IRON MAIDEN
MUMMIES! PYRAMIDS! CHAOS!
INSIDE THE WORLD SLAVERY TOUR

METAL HAMMER

GHOST
And how TikTok's saving metal

PARKWAY DRIVE
Winston McCall: "I landed on a shark"

METAL IN CUBA
The protest that turned to tragedy

BLACKBRAID
The new wave of Native American metal?

VENOM
Witches, rituals, and the birth of extreme

LACUNA COIL
Comalies gets an upgrade

EVANESCENCE

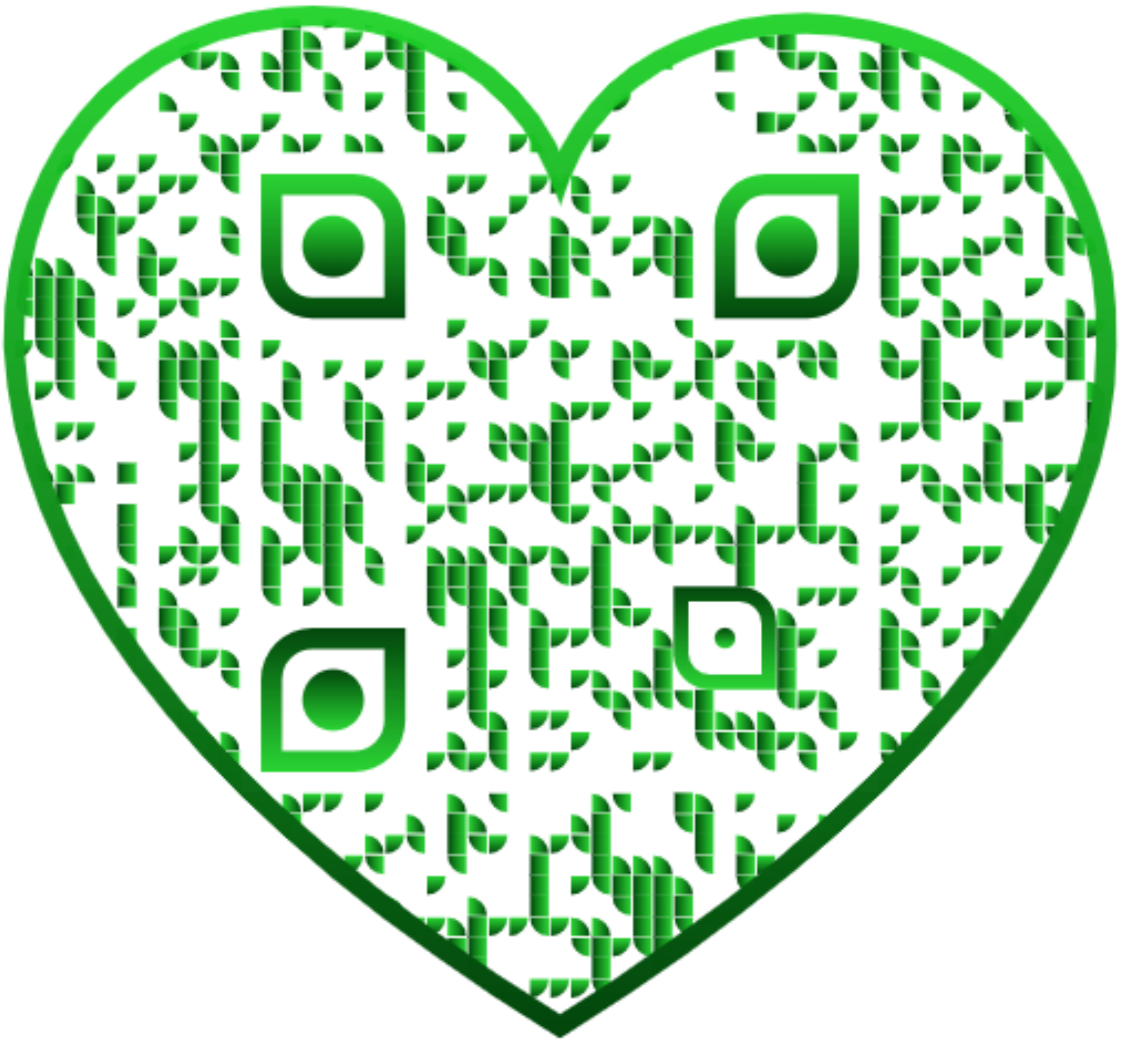
AMY X JONATHAN

KORN

ON FISTFIGHTS, ANGRY CHRISTIANS, AND SURVIVING NU METAL

FUTURE
ISSUE 368

PLUS KATATONIA CLUTCH THE RASMUS ROYAL THUNDER L.S. DUNES DISTURBED SABATON COREY TAYLOR



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BOOM-DA DA-UMMMM-AH AH-ENNA!

OK, SO I'M not Jonathan Davis, but I tried. *Freak On A Leash* isn't just an iconic Korn song, it's an iconic song full stop, so we were thrilled to see him performing it with Evanescence's Amy Lee on their recent US co-headline tour. After we'd finished singing along, we decided we *had* to get them together for a chat about 00s popularity, friendship and the future. The result was enlightening – and surprisingly wholesome.

If you like nu metal, you'll also be stoked to see that this issue features a nod to Papa Roach's biggest-ever hometown show, and our verdict on the new Disturbed album (although as Team *Hammer*'s most enthusiastic Disturbed supporter, I banned myself from reviewing it in the name of objectivity). If you don't like nu metal, well, we've got you covered with Ghost, Clutch, Lacuna Coil, Blackbraid, Maiden and much, much more. Even Cronos! If that's not metal enough for you, then feel free to write us a strongly worded letter or put a hex on us (please don't actually do that last one, though).

Stay metal,

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MEET THE BAND

ROBERT ARELLANO
WRITER
For 30 years, Robert Arellano has been travelling in and writing about Cuba – you can read the results on p72. He used to correct Cubans who called him 'Billy Gibbons', but by keeping them guessing, he's learned strangers will send him free drinks.

LIZ SCARLETT
WRITER
Liz spends her time going to witchy conferences, reading about the occult, and scrolling through TikTok – which came in handy when we asked her to write about how the platform is helping heavy music reach a bigger audience than ever (see p.50).

PARIS FAWCETT
WRITER
Paris can usually be found hugging dogs and completing triathlons, and is *Metal Hammer*'s self-proclaimed biggest Taylor Swift fan. She also loves emo, and put that love to good use by speaking to supergroup L.S. Dunes for this month's issue (see p.28).

36 AMY LEE X JONATHAN DAVIS

16 CLUTCH

22 THE RASMUS

CONT

FRONT ROW

8 Summer's over (boo!) – so why not plan next year's **FESTIVAL FUN**?
10 **PARKWAY DRIVE**'s Winston McCall tackles *your* questions.
14 He's in **KATATONIA** and **BLOODBATH**, so of course Jonas Renkse's Slaylist is bonkers.
16 Get your life lessons and Lemmy stories from **CLUTCH**'s Neil Fallon.
20 In The Studio: **ROYAL THUNDER**.
22 The story behind **THE RASMUS**'s mega-hit, *In The Shadows*.
28 Combining members of MCR, Coheed, Circa Survive and Thursday, it's **L.S. DUNES**.

FEATURES

36 After their co-headlining tour, we grabbed **AMY LEE** and **JONATHAN DAVIS** for a very special chat.
44 **IRON MAIDEN**'s World Slavery Tour might have been epic, but it almost broke the band.
50 Thanks to TikTok, **GHOST** and a host of other heavy bands are getting a whole new lease of life.
56 Venom's **CRONOS** gets the *Metal Hammer* Interview treatment.
62 How **BLACKBRAID** is mixing BM with Indigenous American culture.
66 We head to Milan as **LACUNA COIL** celebrate 20 years of *Comalies*.

62 BLACKBRAID

100 LINGUA IGNOTA

44 IRON MAIDEN

66 LACUNA COIL

ENTS

72 In the 90s, **CUBA'S LOS FRIKIS** took a stand against society, with tragic consequences.

92 Manchester's punk/sludge firebrands **WITCH FEVER** take back the power.

ALBUM REVIEWS

80 Metal behemoths **DISTURBED** make an appeal for unity.
82 **CANDLEMASS** fail to shine.
83 Symphonic heavyweights **EPICA** host a star-studded celebration.
84 Lords of the grotesque **GWAR** get a warts-and-all documentary.
86 **IMHA TARIKAT** hoist up a new black metal standard.
90 West Country sonic renegades **PHOXJAW** go all in on the goof.

LIVE REVIEWS

94 **PARKWAY DRIVE** undergo a trial by fire.
96 **WATAIN** and **ABBATH** go for glory in south London.
97 **ANTHRAX** celebrate four decades of thrash, fun and fury.
99 **COHEED AND CAMBRIA** and **THRICE** share the honours unevenly in Bristol.
101 **COREY TAYLOR** hits the UK – what do *we* think?

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80 DISTURBED

72 METAL IN CUBA

HORN FOR GREATNESS

PAPA ROACH PLAYED their biggest-ever hometown show last month, serenading thousands of festival-goers at California's Aftershock – and they brought along some friends. Headlining the second stage on Saturday October 8, ahead of My Chemical Romance's closing main stage appearance, they welcomed the marching band from the University Of California, Davis to the stage for rousing final song *Born For Greatness*.

The festival took place in Sacramento's Discovery Park, just 35 miles from P-Roach's birthplace of Vacaville. As well as the surprise marching band, there was a special guest appearance from Fever 333's Jason Aalon Butler on their collab song, *Swerve*, and guitarist Jerry Horton's daughter, Emilia, came out to jam bass on The Cure's *Lullaby* between songs.

The band last played Aftershock in 2013, and Jacoby Shaddix told the crowd they had wanted to return – but only when they were able to bag a headline slot. It marked the second time they've performed with a marching band; a high school group joined them during Ohio's Rock On The Range in 2017. H

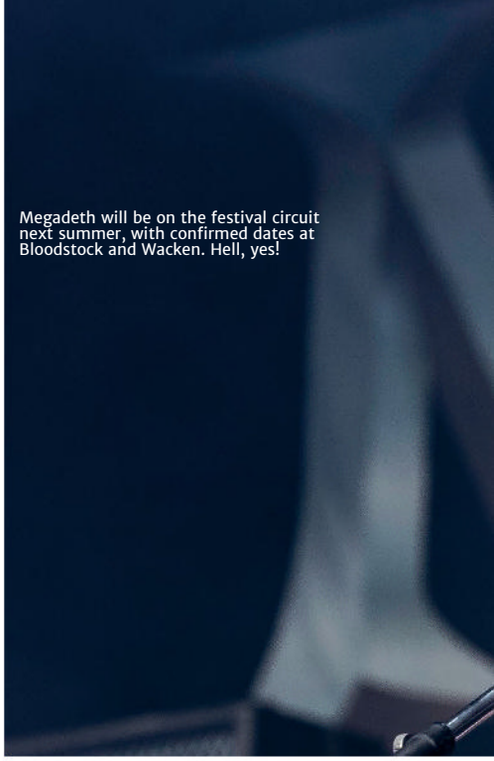
PRESS/ NATHAN ZUCKER

THE HOT TOPIC

FESTIVAL FEVER

The summer season might be over, but there's plenty to look forward to in 2023. We round up some of the best of the fests

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL



Megadeth will be on the festival circuit next summer, with confirmed dates at Bloodstock and Wacken. Hell, yes!

Sepultura: Bloodstock bound!

THIS WAS THE year live music and festival-filled summers finally returned with a bang. And as we head towards 2023, it appears there's no looking back, with our calendars already filling up with dates. We can taste the beer and burgers already…

As ever, we're excited to return to the hallowed turf of Donington Park for the mighty Download. It's always been the big dog of the UK festival season, but 2023 marks its 20th anniversary, and they're pulling out all the stops by giving us a four-day extravaganza from June 8–11. At the time of going to press, Download has yet to announce any of their artists, but keep a close eye on metalhammer.com for updates.

We've got faith in Download, but they've got competition from the impressively expanding Bloodstock. Back when it started out, as a little one-day indoor power metal festival, surely the organisers could never have conceived of the day when they would be seen as a legitimate alternative to the might of whatever was going on at Castle Donington. Taking place from August 10–13, with a stacked line-up including Megadeth, Anthrax, In Flames, Sepultura, Zeal & Ardor, Whitechapel, Devildriver and Knocked Loose, that might well now be the case. The most exciting development, though, is the addition of metalcore legends Killswitch Engage coming over for their first-ever UK festival headlining slot – it's got 'iconic' written all over it.

That's already plenty for UK-based fans of heavy music, but it's only scratching the surface. The festival season actually kicks off in May, with Desertfest in London's Camden. Beginning as a pure stoner festival, it's branched out over the years, and the line-up already features an eclectic mix of Uncle Acid & The Deadbeats, Kadavar, Graveyard, Inter Arma and Blood Ceremony.

For fans of something a little more complex than 'just' worshipping the mighty riff, Arctangent will again be bringing the finest post-metal, math rock and tech on the planet to Fernhill Farm in Bristol in August, with Tech-Fest bringing a more djent and technical death metal-centric bill in June/July at Newark Showground, and Radar migrating its weekend of progressive metal from Guildford to Manchester in July.

Those of you keen to spin kick and throw those hardcore moves will certainly have your beady eyes on the rapidly increasing progress of Outbreak. Fresh from having an iconic headlining set from Turnstile last June, it'll be interesting to see if they can deliver again.

There are always a few metal names at Slam Dunk in May – Malevolence are sure to get the biggest pit of the day at 2023's iteration – and it's usually the same with 2000Trees in July, which has yet to announce. Plus, Glastonbury and Reading & Leeds are such mammoth festivals that hope springs eternal for some metal surprises on the bill – particularly with the success of Earache's recent involvement and Bring Me The Horizon's rapturously received set at this year's R&L.

Still, it's not all about the UK, because the European festival circuit is a mouthwatering proposition.

FESTIVAL SEASON HAS RETURNED WITH A BANG!

MEGADETH: KEVIN NIXON. SEPULTURA: KATJA OGRIN

RAMMSTEIN: PRESS/BRYAN ADAMS

In Germany, Wacken's reputation as the biggest metal festival on the planet is assured at this point, and with Iron Maiden, Megadeth, Trivium, Jinjer, Wardruna and Beartooth already announced, tickets are basically like gold dust. Hellfest in Clisson, France, blew everyone away last year by basically booking every band ever for their week-long return; unsurprisingly, they've already sold out for 2023.

If you don't have tickets for those, there are plenty of other options. You could head to Switzerland in June for Greenfield and see Slipknot, Parkway Drive, Amon Amarth and Sabaton, or nip to Austria the same month for Nova Rock, which has snagged Architects, Tenacious D, I Prevail and Arch Enemy among others. Alternatively, there's the beautifully scenic MetalDays in Slovenia in July, which has Paradise Lost, Tesseract, At The Gates and Bleed From Within confirmed to play, with breathtaking mountain views as a backdrop. Then there's Summer Breeze in Bavaria in August, boasting Powerwolf, In Flames, Obituary, While She Sleeps, Dying Fetus and Sleep Token.

There's also a host of festivals on the other side of the Atlantic, from Aftershock to Welcome To Rockville to Louder Than Life to Riot Fest, most of which have yet to confirm any artists, but are certain to be jam-packed with the best metal has to offer.

Basically, wherever you are on the planet come summer 2023, you're sure to be in close proximity to a field with a stage, with some heavy metal being played on it. Which is exactly how we like it! MH

FOR MORE 2023 FESTIVAL UPDATES, BE SURE TO CHECK METALHAMMER.COM

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

BABYMETAL ARE BACK

A year since they posted a cryptic message suggesting they were on hiatus, Babymetal have announced a new album for March, and released single *Divine Attack – Shingeki*. That's not all, though...

SABATON'S ARENA RUN IS THE MADDEST TOUR ON EARTH

Babymetal. Lordi. Sabaton. If that doesn't sound like the most insane (and production-intensive) tour you've ever heard, we don't know what is.

SERJ WANTS PEOPLE TO STOP (SUEY)

System Of A Down vocalist Serj Tankian says fans keep scaring him by screaming "Wake up!" at him. Bahahaha!

TERRIFIER 2 LIVES UP TO ITS NAME

Recently released horror sequel *Terrifier 2* is apparently so stomach-turning it has audiences fainting, vomiting and calling ambulances to movie theatres.

TOM DELONGE IS BACK IN BLINK 182

Which presumably means Travis Barker can stop trying to run a one-man pop-punk renaissance. Don't ask about ticket prices, mind.

EXTREME METAL ISN'T GOING TO IMPROVE YOUR LOVE LIFE

A study shared by *QI* suggested the reason many straight male extreme metal guitarists play is to impress... other straight male guitarists.

LZZY HALE LOVES GWAR

She guested as Clitaurus Maximus The She Bull on their song *The Cutter*.

Rammstein: touts? Nein

RAMMSTEIN SAID NO TO VIAGOGO

The German sextet have put a restraining order on ticket resellers Viagogo for next year's stadium tour.

IVAN MOODY WANTS TO "RETIRE FROM HEAVY METAL"

The 5FDP frontman has suggested he only has one more metal album in him before he moves to new pastures.

SEBASTIAN BACH IS ROWING AGAIN

Seb ended up in a social media spat with Falling In Reverse's Ronnie Radke when the latter's band cancelled upcoming shows due to missing laptops. Oh dear.

HOW MANY FIVE-YEAR-OLDS COULD YOU TAKE IN A FIGHT?

Parkway Drive's fearless frontman Winston McCall faces your questions on killer kids, wrestling sharks and how much fire he can handle

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: DAVE LePAGE

LOVE 'EM OR loathe 'em, Parkway Drive are the southern hemisphere's biggest metal band. New album *Darker Still* has reaffirmed the Aussie metalcore brutes as arena-level stars in the UK and Europe: a seismic achievement considering the band almost broke up while making it. In answering your questions, singer Winston McCall delves deep into Parkway's three-year hiatus. He also ends up chatting about surfing onto a shark, making his crew throw up and how many infants he thinks he can pummel in one go…

How do you deal with the hardcore and metal elitists/gatekeepers?
Chris Parker, Facebook
"I don't. Ha ha! I don't deal with them at all. My only interaction with anyone in this world is when they come up to me and say hi at a gig or a signing or something. I have genuine human interaction and it's only ever been really nice. I've never had someone tell me I should go die in real life or that my music sounds like donkey shit. Elitism and all those things only exist online, and I don't associate with that stuff."

How much fire is too much fire?
@Dai_Robot, Twitter
"All of the fire buttons at once. We tested it. We were like, 'What if you pressed all the buttons at once?', and that's when the true fear of what's possible happened. It was terrifying enough to make all of us run out the venue. It burnt so much of the oxygen out of the room, it made a bunch of the crew sick. It fucked with their ears and they went outside and vomited."

How many five-year-olds could each of you take in a fight?
Charlie Hill, Facebook
"Is this guilt-free play-fighting or bloodsport?"

***Hammer*: Let's assume these five-year-olds want to kill you.**
"Hmm… [Winston mimes punching at waist height] Each person would be able to take several waves of 10 five-year-olds at once, I reckon. Five-year-olds are big enough that you could pick one of them up and use them as a weapon against the other five-year-olds. Between watching *Step Brothers* and playing *Call Of Duty: Zombies*, I think I've got enough strategy on how to beat a five-year-old with another five-year-old. After several waves we'd get tired and the balance would shift."

Winston aced his audition for the next *Men In Black* movie

How do you cope with extreme depression and what steps can we take to stop the self-loathing?
Zare Ralof Karadzin, Facebook
"That's a great one. Talk to someone that's outside of your family group and your support group, not anyone that's going to lead you to continue the cycle you're on. I can't stress enough the value of a voice that's outside the experiences you're already having. Even with their positive reinforcement, the voices you have now will continue the cycle that's going on, and that cycle needs to be broken. You need a voice outside to help you get a different perspective and provide you with new pathways. There are massive systems of wonderful people out there specifically to try and help with that. It's nothing to be afraid or ashamed of. It's like anything else in life: if something's not working for you, bring in a new element to really make change. Otherwise you're left with the same elements to try and figure out a new thing."

Would you rather wrestle a bear or a shark?
Chris Flynn, Facebook
"Bear, because you could at least hold onto its fur and won't have to hold your breath. I've thought about the shark part many times. Their eyes are probably their weakest point but, fuck dude, if you see one of these things in ▶

“I WANT MY ENTIRE FACE TO LOOK LIKE DARTH MAUL”

If Winston became Darth Maul, would he get a double-ended mic stand?

real life, you realise how much of it is basically just luck. Imagine a car coming towards you that has teeth. You quickly realise how ill-equipped you are in that environment."

***Hammer*: Ever had any close calls?**
"Last year, on my birthday, I came off a wave [while surfing] and stopped straight on top of one. It was a juvenile white, four metres long. I got away from the head, thinking, 'Please don't turn around, please don't turn around,' and it started lazing its way up the sandbank. I screamed at the dude up the bank: 'There's a fucking shark coming for you!' There were, like, 300 people in the ocean that day and nothing happened. Thank fuck."

What's so special about the road Parkway Drive?
Alicia Rutter, email
"It's where we started! That's the street that our drummer, Ben [Gordon], his parents' house is on. Thousands of street signs have been stolen from there because of us. It's a tourist attraction to the point that our council tried to buy the name: they wanted to buy us out of our name many years ago. They stopped putting street signs up and started painting it on the road. Instead of stealing signs, people were lying on the road to get photos taken. It was so dangerous that now there are just no markings for that road whatsoever."

Have you ever played knifey-spoony?
Charlie Birchall, Facebook
"Ha ha! I've won it a couple times. It's hard to master. If someone wearing a hat and with no sleeves on challenges you to it, they're pretty legit."

If you were forced to get one thing tattooed on your forehead, what would it be and why?
Deshaun Smith, email
"I'll take away 'forehead' and substitute in 'entire face' – I want my entire face to look like Darth Maul. Fuck it, I'd commit to the entire body piece that transforms me completely into him."

Parkway's had the same line-up for 17 years now. What keeps you all together? How helpful was the break before this album?
Jane Mahon, email
"Survival and love are what's kept us together. We're great friends, but we've also within that had some quite toxic traits, in terms of growing up in a band and not learning how to communicate properly. All of those things led us to take the break. If we hadn't taken the break, we would have imploded. The eureka moment was, 'We're *not* ready to come back.' That was the reality of, 'We have a tour in two months' time' – the US tour we cancelled – and 'who's psyched for it? No one.'"

Winston: pretty good at knifey-spoony

"AT NIGHT, KOALAS SOUND LIKE DEMONS"

***Hammer*: Did the new music get you back together?**
"It's what almost tore us apart! Creating new music in the environment that we did was what brought everything to a head and made us realise that the way we were operating wasn't sustainable."

What is the most useful thing you've discovered about yourself in therapy?
Charlotte Amphlett, email
"That I'm a very intense person. I found this out from my bandmates. I always thought I was this fluffy ray of sunshine that had no effect on people. I thought the presence I give onstage is unique to what happens onstage, and that apparently isn't the case. The rest of the guys were like, 'When you change your mood to something more intense, it's like the fucking weather has shifted in the room. You go into an intense mood so we try to give you space.' But, at that moment, I really need someone to help me and I need some support, which is the exact opposite. The communication surrounding it has become, 'Tell me that I'm doing it and I'll tell you how I'm feeling.'"

Emotionally, what songs are the hardest for you to perform live?
Ty Alvin Reimerink, Facebook
"*The Colour Of Leaving* has been the only one. We did it for the Reverence tour in Europe and it is pure grief. That was a fucking massive challenge. I wrote part of that song when my dog died, part of it when Tom Searle [Architects' guitarist] passed away, then part of it when my friend lost his partner. That all happened within the space of three months. It was a lot of losing friends and beings you're close with. The lyrics very directly reference those events."

Koalas: nice or nasty?
Joy Morris, email
"I love them! Like anything in Australia, they'll fuck you up, but they probably look the cutest fucking you up. They sleep for 22 hours a day but, if you've ever heard a koala at night, it sounds like someone getting murdered. They live out the back of my parents' place and it's like either a demon or someone getting killed in the woods."

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THE SLAYLIST

JONAS RENKSE

He sings in progressive metallers Katatonia and mans the low end for death metal nasties Bloodbath. So *of course* his taste is eclectic

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: MATHIAS BLOM

Jonas Renkse likes to mix it up

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"I'VE ALWAYS HAD a soft spot for American country music. Some of it's very sad. I'm not talking about Dolly Parton; I'm thinking more of *Appalachian Nightmare* by **JUSTIN TOWNES EARLE**. It's a long song, but the focus for me is on the lyrics. They're superb. It's a person looking back on a shitty life, from being young up until the ending of the song, which is probably a suicide. Another Americana song is *Black Heart* by **CALEXICO**, which I picked because it has a filmic theme. It's dramatic; I love what they're doing production-wise and the vocals are carefully sung. I like the contradiction of the [grandeur] of the music and melodies, and the vocals being laidback.

"**THOM YORKE** is a genius. Some of his stuff goes over my head, but *Suspirium*, from the *Suspiria* soundtrack, moved me so much. I played it to my friend Mikael Åkerfeldt and he was like, 'Oh, this is good!' Six months later, he texted me: 'What was that song? It was a six out of five!' Speaking of horror films, **MORTE MACABRE** only did one album [*Symphonic Holocaust*], and they recorded their own versions of themes from Italian horrors and B movies. *Apoteosi Del Mistero* is instrumental and very 70s-sounding, and it works as background music or if you crank it up and get devoured by it.

"I love *The Scale* by **INTERPOL**. There's energy to the song, but it's also downtrodden: I like that kind of balance. It's simple but it has some super-good hooks, and I like the lyrics and the vocals very much. To me, it's a song that works before a party, as well as afterwards when you're hungover. Another song like that is **CHELSEA WOLFE**'s *Deranged For Rock & Roll*. She's done so much that's more dark and intricate – some of her songs are so dark that they're creepy – but I love the structure. It's basic, [built around] her voice and production. And the message makes it top notch: it's a Judas Priest message executed in spooky Americana.

"*Dust Bowl III* is one of those songs I found just by looking for new music. I don't know much about **OTHER LIVES** but I think they're doing some nice, filmic, dramatic and complex music. It's laidback and it has a sad undertone that I really like. I don't know how to exactly describe it, but it sounds like a tribe having to move from where they live because of an attack or a drought. The vocals are perfect: they're not overdoing anything, they're just telling a story.

"**ALL THEM WITCHES**' *Enemy Of My Enemy* is another recent discovery for me. I instantly fell for their mix of blues and classic hard rock. They're an American band, but some stuff sounds European, with NWOBHM in there.

"**MORBID ANGEL**'s *Altars Of Madness* is one of my favourite albums and, over the last few years when I've been listening to it, I've been coming back to the song *Damnation*. It's pure death metal. The lyrics, the drums, the riffs: everything about it's perfect. And it's so fast! I remember buying *Altars...* and thinking I'd put it on the wrong speed on the record player. I'm a huge fan of **KING DIAMOND** as well. I love so much of what he's done, especially Mercyful Fate up until [1990 album] *The Eye*. I always thought the best King Diamond song was *The Accusation Chair* and I've never met anyone that agrees. It's perfect! The drum work is great, there are nice riffs, and it also has that theatrical stuff at the end. It has pretty much everything I want from a King Diamond song."

"THOM YORKE IS A GENIUS. SOME OF HIS STUFF GOES OVER MY HEAD"

BLOODBATH'S *SURVIVAL OF THE SICKEST* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM. A 10TH-ANNIVERSARY REISSUE OF KATATONIA'S *DEAD END KINGS* IS OUT ON NOVEMBER 11 VIA PEACEVILLE. KATATONIA TOUR THE UK WITH SÓLSTAFIR IN FEBRUARY

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LIFE LESSONS

NEIL FALLON

From touring with Motörhead to not wanting to be Dave Grohl, Clutch's fiery preacher shares the parables that have made his band a rock'n'roll mainstay

WORDS: MÖRAT

ARGUABLY THE GREATEST living rock'n'roll band on the planet, Clutch have released 13 near-perfect albums over the span of a 30-year career that's seen their cult-like following grow from small clubs to massive venues worldwide. Never a band to rely on gimmicks or follow trends, they've earned every acolyte the hard way. With a new album, *Sunrise On Slaughter Beach*, added to their arsenal, we talk to frontman Neil Fallon – perhaps the coolest lyricist of modern times – about what keeps them on the road.

ANGER IS AN ENERGY. AND A WASTE OF ENERGY

"Anger is exhausting! There's something to be said for anger management, because you can see when someone has spent their whole life angry. You can see it on their face once they reach mid-life. It's also time consuming. So for me, listening to hardcore punk rock, that emotion can sometimes be misplaced. I mean, you can be aggro, but also positive."

THEY WERE MOTÖRHEAD AND THEY PLAYED ROCK'N'ROLL

"We toured with Motörhead at the end of their run. This wasn't 1980, but it was an incredibly disciplined machine. From the top down, there was an expectation of professionalism. You can do what you want, but if it compromises the show, it has to go. Everything was about that set. Although, Lemmy said the only songs that matter are the first song and the last song, because no one ever remembers anything in the middle. Maybe that was cheeky wisdom, but it was wisdom nonetheless."

TOURING IS NEVER BORING

"I'd say we've played probably around 4,000 shows, but because we're a live band we really honestly enjoy playing. Sure, being away from home is a drag; we're at the end of six weeks right now and I can't get home quick enough. That's not to say we're gonna phone in tonight's performance. Also, as I've got older, I've begun to realise what a rare scenario this is, to have this as one's career. To be able to travel the world and meet people through something you've done creatively, and that's all you have to do to make ends meet… you damn well better do it!"

GIVE YOUR SOUL TO ROCK'N'ROLL

"I got it hammered into my head at a young age that this was not a viable thing to do. You're supposed to get a job that you hate and get high blood pressure, but once I realised that this was something I could do, it was a lot more fun and I took it way more seriously. Was there a back-up plan? Not really. I was studying English at school, but it doesn't really have any practical application, although in this case it did. I thank my lucky stars."

SLOW AND STEADY GETS YOU FANS FOR LIFE

"It's like the three little pigs: you can build a house out of sticks very quickly, but it falls apart very quickly. It takes a lot longer and a lot more dedication to build it out of stone, but it will be there long after you're gone. Also, to come out of the gates and get a taste of success first thing, it's a pretty bitter pill to swallow to get a scaled-down version of that. There's something to be said about having to make your own bed. I've always been of the mind that the incredibly wealthy of this world are all kind of insane, because they haven't had to learn life's lessons the way the rest of us have. That can also be the case with artists or actors. Suddenly they have assistants who are running to and fro, and everybody has their own bus, but it's probably not gonna last very long and you might be very resentful when you have to join the rest of us."

"THE INCREDIBLY WEALTHY OF THIS WORLD ARE ALL KIND OF INSANE"

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS PREACH TO YOUR OWN CHOIR

"It's a war of attrition and that's what you have to do. One thing I learned opening for other bands: you can't judge the crowd by the front row, because the front row have been there since noon waiting for the headliner and they're the most rabid of the headliner's fans, so of course they're not gonna go over the moon for you. But behind them are hundreds of other people. That Marilyn Manson tour [in 1995], if you had asked me in the middle of it, I would have said it was the biggest waste of time ever. But on our next headlining tour, our shows were bigger and there were a lot of Marilyn Manson fans at the back of the club. You can't always preach to your own choir or you're not gonna get more in your tent."

JUST BECAUSE 'MAYBE' RHYMES WITH 'BABY' DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD

"Sometimes I kick myself in the ass, because I can fall in love with a word that you don't hear every day. On the new record there's a song where the first word is 'jaundiced', and I've been wanting to use that word for years. I'll spend hours trying to come up with an idea and execute it correctly. I have a tendency to over-write, but I think it's because words are fun. I'm sure if you ran all my lyrics through a computer, it would pick up a habitual word."

DIY IS NOT JUST FOR PUNKS

"At the very beginning we were of two minds: we were like, do we do it like Dischord? Because they loomed so large in our world, because geographically that's where we're from. Then we had managers saying, 'You can get signed, but if you say no, this opportunity only knocks once.' So, for the better part of the 90s we were signed to labels, but that well kinda dried up for everybody around 2000. Owning your own catalogue and selling your own merch makes all the difference in the world. It's more work, but you make your own decisions and your own mistakes. If you're in a position to do what we're doing, I don't see why you wouldn't. I met a manager – who shall remain nameless – and he was bragging about a multi-album contract that they just signed. That manager asked who we were with and I said we put out our own music, and the

PRESS

Hammer's favourite preacher can make just about anything rhyme

"ROCK'N'ROLL IS NO LONGER KING OF THE HILL, AND THAT'S OK"

reaction was, 'Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.' Clearly there's no conversation to be had, because we're on different planets!"

DAD ROCK IS COOL

"When I first heard that term and how it was used, it seemed very derogatory, but a 50-year-old guy in a band is clearly dad rock. When a group of people can embrace the term, they make it their own, which happens time and time again… This one, of course, isn't nearly as offensive as others, more taking the piss, but I was born in '71, kinda the same year that heavy metal came to be, and I got to see punk rock come to be, and hardcore and hip hop, entire music genres in my lifetime. Rock'n'roll is no longer king of the hill, and that's OK, but it's important to remember that rock'n'roll isn't going anywhere. Right now there's some band in a garage, just doing it for shits and giggles."

FAME SUCKS

"We just do this because we like doing it and fame has never been an enticement or part of the goal. There's been moments when I've got a taste of what it's like to not be anonymous in public, like at a restaurant when someone comes up and wants to talk to you… You don't wanna talk to them, you want to talk to your family. Not that it happens chronically, but I've gotten glimpses of that and I can't imagine what it must be like for someone like Dave Grohl. A band like Tool are probably pretty anonymous in many ways, and they could probably walk into any concert and I'd be hard pressed to tell you who they were. But once it's gone, it's gone, and it would suck to be in a position where you're in a prison of your own success."

KEEPING THE SAME LINE-UP FOR 30 YEARS TAKES PATIENCE

"You need a good sense of humour and respect for other people's spaces, being able to read the room. If someone looks like they want to be left alone that day, you leave them alone, because touring can be a bit of a pressure cooker. Usually as a band, if you can get through your first couple of van tours, that's sort of the crucible. If this is what you love then everyone wants to get on board, but it's also luck. I'm sure there's been times when musicians want to work together and then after a week on the road they discover that they can't stand each other."

***SUNRISE ON SLAUGHTER BEACH* IS OUT NOW VIA WEATHERMAKER. CLUTCH'S UK TOUR STARTS NOVEMBER 11**

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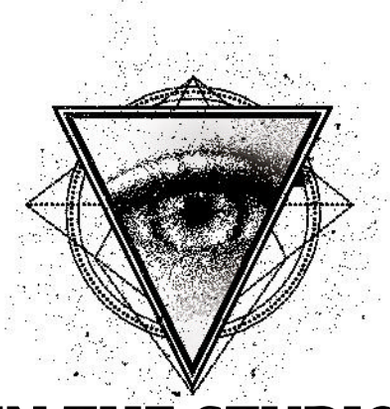
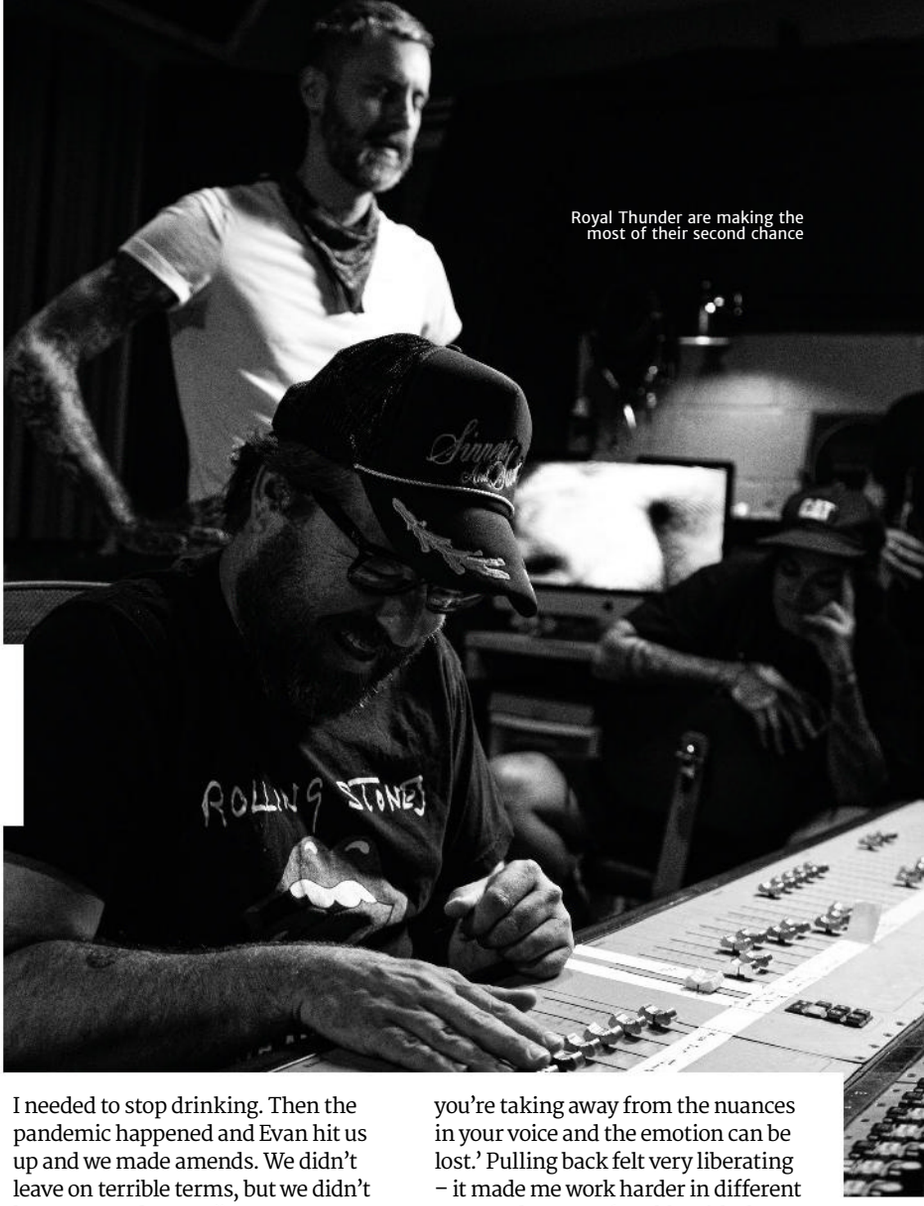


IN THE STUDIO

ROYAL THUNDER

Atlantan rockers return from the edge of oblivion with a message of healing through honesty

WORDS: RICH HOBSON



Royal Thunder are making the most of their second chance

FOR ROYAL THUNDER, emotional candour comes as naturally as breathing. Across three albums and two EPs, the Atlantan group created a spellbinding mix of emotive, soulful melodies and timeless compositions, Mlny Parsonz's stunning voice as much in line with the likes of Grace Slick and Ann Wilson as modern powerhouses like Cammie Beverly and Lzzy Hale. But five years since their last record, they tell us they've gone to hell and back to return with their strongest – and most honest – record to date.

Where have you been for five years?!
Josh Weaver (guitars): "Before the pandemic, partying had become a big thing; the music was almost secondary. I'd run so hard the wheels had come off the vehicle. Years of not dealing with business or our personal lives, just saying, 'Let's go to the bar instead,' added up. Everything had to fall apart before we could set things right."
Mlny Parsonz (bass/vocals): "Having a good time kept us from giving much of a shit about anything. Evan [Diprima, drums] left and it was hard not having him around. We were still playing, but our hearts were broken."

So what changed?
Josh: "Around my 40th birthday, I figured if I was going to do things right I needed to stop drinking. Then the pandemic happened and Evan hit us up and we made amends. We didn't leave on terrible terms, but we didn't leave on good terms."
Evan: "We never talked about what was happening. When I left, I was playing with other bands but I was kidding myself. It didn't feel the same, but I was too embarrassed to go back and try to work things out. Finally, I couldn't take any more so I called back because this connection and partnership is rare."
Josh: "The music is so sacred; it's taken so much of our lives so it would be an injustice to not give it our all. It's very special, what we have."

Has the break changed your sound?
Josh: "It's still 100% Royal Thunder, but stripped down. People tell us seeing us live is this whole other experience, so we've tried to create that vibe of being in a room playing the songs together. It's a 'less is more' vibe. It's got that early Zeppelin or Hendrix vibe – not that we sound like those bands, more that we want to capture the energy of classic rock'n'roll."
Mlny: "It's the first record where I've been pulling back vocally. Our producer, Tom Tapley, said to me, 'You think that belting this out with everything you've got gives this full experience, but you're taking away from the nuances in your voice and the emotion can be lost.' Pulling back felt very liberating – it made me work harder in different ways and get comfortable with the vulnerability in my voice."

Have your experiences shaped the lyrical themes of the album?
Mlny: "It's about reclaiming power, abandoning ship and rebuilding a mountain, the 'mountain' being this life you've created and worked so hard towards, then watched crumble. For me, it was also going back to dark places where things weren't going well, and kinda apologising for that but releasing what I felt was the consequence of being an asshole and doing the wrong thing. A lot of it was metaphors for things that were sucking the life out of me."
Josh: "It comes from a place of loss. I lost so much of my life to drinking – years, but also friends, to addiction. We've all lost so many people, both in death and those who are out there and hurting. Not everybody gets a second chance, so we're so thankful that we've been able to make things right."
Mlny: "This album is our chance to make things happen – we've done things the right way. If this is the last album we ever make, I'm happy. I feel spoiled to have these guys."

THE NEW ALBUM IS EXPECTED IN 2023 VIA SPINEFARM

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
4

STUDIO:
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PRODUCER:
Tom Tapley

EXPECT:
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PRESS/JUSTIN REICH

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THE STORY BEHIND

IN THE SHADOWS

THE RASMUS

The Rasmus were already beloved in their homeland of Finland, but *In The Shadows* turned them into global gothic superstars

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT

WHEN *IN THE Shadows* shot The Rasmus to international superstardom in 2003, they were already accustomed to life in the spotlight. Their first four albums, although not globally popular, had made them stars in their homeland of Finland, giving them full rein to spend their time writing music, chasing girls and doing all the things that young 20-somethings do when living freely on the road.

"In the beginning it was so crazy because we got so famous so fast," recalls frontman Lauri Ylönen. "We've lived all our life in this kind of bubble. I'm still in that bubble."

Despite enjoying the perks of their success, Lauri, an introvert, was unsure how to navigate the sudden lack of privacy and anonymity. "In Finland, everybody knew my face and it was sometimes not very nice to be that guy," he says. "We started very young, I was in eighth grade when we put the band together. Since I was 15, we'd been very different from the normal guys – 95% of the guys were into soccer, and then there was us, who listened to Red Hot Chili Peppers and Nirvana."

Red Hot Chili Peppers might not be an obvious influence, but they definitely inspired much of The Rasmus's early career. Back then, their music was less serious, less gothic, and, as Lauri describes it, perhaps even "a little funky". "I used to have white hair and wear a white feather," he says. "It was pure and nice and clean. I've always had my looks follow my feelings."

THE FACTS

RELEASED: 2003

ALBUM: *Dead Letters*

PERSONNEL: Lauri Ylönen (vocals), Pauli Rantasalmi (guitar), Eero Heinonen (bass), Aki Hakala (drums)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION: #1 (Austria, Finland, Germany, Switzerland)

This sense of youthful playfulness could only get The Rasmus so far, however. By 2002 they still hadn't broken out of Finland, and their formula clearly wasn't working. Fortunately, this uncertainty pushed them to evolve. *In The Shadows* perfectly encapsulated a transitional period of Lauri's life; from light into darkness in terms of aesthetic and themes, as the band adopted a more gothic outlook, and from the naivety of youth into the demands and obligations of adulthood.

"I felt like I was dealing with more pressure, dealing with more fame and starting to become more introverted," explains the vocalist. "I was growing up and facing more in life. There were more responsibilities and all the boring adult stuff I had to deal with. I was getting more aware, and maybe being more afraid of things."

One of the things Lauri dreaded most was impending national service in the Finnish army. A necessity for all adult men in Finland, to Lauri it was another obstacle that endangered his chances of doing what he loved.

"I just wanted to play music," he explains. "Like I say in the lyrics: *'I have to learn to kill before I can feel safe'*, all these [feelings] that I was dealing with at that moment I put in the song."

Thankfully, Lauri managed to avoid his call-up, instead keeping The Rasmus on the road, playing shows in Finland with goth rockers Him. As he began to flirt with darker influences as a way of channelling his introversion, Him frontman Ville Valo was there to offer solace in the esoteric and consuming world of occultism, lending him books on witchcraft, magician Aleister Crowley and "other weird and mystical things". It was a bottomless pool of inspiration, and worlds away from the superficiality of success; the perfect hiding spot for an introvert.

In The Shadows was born on the road and "started off as a jam", explains Lauri. "We were soundchecking in Finland, and I was finishing my lunch as my bandmates were onstage. I was on a table on the other side of the hall, and the guys began playing the main riff, which made me begin to hum along in between bites of my sandwich."

The song's "annoying hook" became instantly embedded in Lauri's mind,

GETTY

In The Shadows helped The Rasmus break out of their native Finland

and when The Rasmus hit the studio to record what would be their fifth studio album, *Dead Letters*, it blossomed.

"I just fell in love with it," he says. "The fact there's a lot going on, but somehow it's minimalistic, too."

Despite Lauri's initial fascination with *In The Shadows*, he wasn't expecting it to be a hit.

"Actually, I wasn't gonna put it out," he admits. "I was thinking of other songs. It was the label's decision to use it as the first single, so I just went with it and it happened to be released at the right time with other bands that were popular in the gothic pop/rock scene like Evanescence and My Chemical Romance."

Dead Letters was The Rasmus's first album to be licensed for release outside Finland and Sweden, after it was picked up by two music executives in Germany who thought it would be the next "big thing". The album, which would define The Rasmus's style for years to come, spread throughout the country like wildfire, and was propelled around the globe by its floor-filling lead single.

After its release in February 2003, *In The Shadows* made its way onto chart lists throughout Europe and Oceania, landing at No.3 in the UK, and even taking the top spot in New Zealand. Over time, it received six gold and two platinum awards, and sold a mammoth one million copies. It helped make *Dead Letters* an international phenomenon, changing Lauri and his bandmates' lives forever. By the band's own admission, the fame they had experienced previously was nothing compared to this.

"WE'VE LIVED ALL OUR LIFE IN A BUBBLE. I'M STILL IN THAT BUBBLE"

LAURI YLÖNEN

"It was like we had 10 years of rehearsals in Finland, and now it was a million times more," Lauri recalls. "It was crazy, and hard to keep our feet on the ground – especially because we were partying a lot."

Most of Lauri's memories of this time concern wild soirees, like the night he slept in a graveyard after staying up until the early hours at a party.

"We had a photoshoot the next day," he offers by way of explanation. "It was supposed to be a sunrise shoot on a bridge in Stockholm, and I was like, 'Oh, well, I'm just gonna go and party all night long and go straight to the photoshoot', because I was already close to the place, but then I kind of felt tired and I decided to sleep in the graveyard. I was looking for thrill, putting myself in uncomfortable situations to get an experience."

But perhaps the biggest thrill of all was that The Rasmus were no longer confined to Finland; they could now go wherever they wanted.

"All of a sudden we were able to play all over the world because of this one song," Lauri says. "Anywhere we went, we had people waiting for us at the airport. That's crazy and you can't prepare for that."

Life escalated. The parties were bigger, the tours were longer, and the fans were crazier. In fact, some fans were so infatuated with the band

Finland's feathered frontman, Lauri Ylönen

"SOME FANS WOULD GO FUCKING MAD AND PRACTISE BLACK MAGIC ON EACH OTHER"

LAURI YLÖNEN

that there were even rivalries between different fan groups.

"Our Latin American fans would get jealous if we, for example, did something for the Argentinian fan club, like a special greeting or whatever. Some fans would go fucking mad and start practising black magic [on each other]."

Lauri's social anxiety had also increased, leaving him again searching for something to curtail his nerves. A lifestyle of constant partying offered an effective yet temporary solution to this problem.

"It was cool, but also kind of dangerous," he says. "I think I got used to that lifestyle too much. I saw it somehow as a kind of shield. But now I've been sober 14 years already, and it's better for me. Back then it was wild, and we all had moments where we got to be rock stars."

In The Shadows was such a success that it even had four music videos – the European (Crow) version, the Finnish (Bandit) version, the American (Mirror) version, and a fourth performance version. Possibly its most well-known video is the Mirror edition, which saw the band perform inside a gothic mansion, with Lauri donning his trademark black feathers.

"We actually did the video in Romania," he recalls. "It was cool because we had all these Romanian fans there and they were all dressed up, and we spent one long night in this cold mansion together. The feeling was kind of creepy in that building because it was cold and haunted."

Almost 20 years since *In The Shadows* sent the world into a frenzy of gothic pop and feathered hair-dos, Lauri is still as in love with the track as he was when he first heard it, and it'll never leave their setlists.

"It's still a big song, and every time we play it, it has a massive effect on people. Whenever I hear it on the radio, it encourages me to try to be original, as the song is so strange, which is good. It's a reminder to strive to find your own sound and voice, instead of being like all the others. It still inspires me now."

NEW ALBUM *RISE* IS OUT NOW VIA PLAYGROUND MUSIC SCANDINAVIA

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PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

YOUR SHOUT

MURDERDOLLS WILL ALWAYS KICK ASS

…and other declarations of adoration, hatred and apathy you had to offer about the Lamb Of God–adorned issue of *Hammer*, featuring the likes of Amy Lee, Coheed And Cambria and more!

HORNY BLYTHE

Randy Blythe says he won't write a Lamb Of God song about a lovely afternoon he spent with a lady. A million fans say we'd absolutely buy a sexy Lamb Of God album. Metalheads need sweet lovin' soundtracks, too.

Becci Edwards, email

Move over Barry White! Much as Randy told us about his plans to branch out musically, we can't see him going into sweet soul crooning anytime soon though, Becci.

LAMB OF SLOG

Nine Lamb Of God albums that all sound the same. Why be the AC/DC of metal if you can't even fill stadiums?

Jac Coleman, Twitter

Actually Jac, we think you'll find that's *11* albums of world-beating groove metal brilliance, if you count Burn The Priest. So nyerh.

THE LOG HAUL

Awesome interview with Lamb Of God! As long as they keep playing, I'm going, I don't care if they're 70!

Brian Florky, Facebook

We wholeheartedly agree, Brian! Lamb Of God are on insane form right now and we'll happily go for a Walk With Them In Hell (and other, less fiendish, places preferably).

HEAVENESCENCE

Love, love, *love* the interview with Amy Lee in the new issue of *Hammer*. My only gripe… why only three pages?! She's a clear cover star.

Alex Manderson, Twitter

You got us, Alex – so here you go, a whole cover feature with Amy Lee *and* Jonathan Davis. How effin awesome is that?

ROCKERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Loved seeing an article on African metal in the new *Hammer* – love seeing stuff from around the world, hope there's plenty more to come!

StephSematary, Twitter

There certainly is! We love finding out about the exciting things happening around the world, so you can bet we will always offer a platform to bands no matter where they come from.

THE SNUFFERING

Bit freaky to open up the new *Hammer* and see Coheed's Claudio Sanchez apparently bragging about slitting a man's

#TWEETS

That's a thought, Creed were just Jesus Pearl Jam and Tool were just jazz Creed.
Thom Egerton, God Damn (@goddamnthom)

Anyone else look at their pet and get so overwhelmed with love that they just want to claw their own fucking eyeballs out or is that just me
Djamila Azzouz, Ithaca (@djamilayasmin)

My life is a series of bootleg shirts showing up in the mail that I forgot I ordered
Uniform (@uniform_nyc)

Yesterday a guy pointed at me and said "Hey I know you! You're that famous comedian!" I wonder who he thought I was?
Mark Hoppus, Blink 182 (@markhoppus)

Had such a relaxing weekend that I forgot I have to go to work to earn a living. Livid huns. x
Debbie Gough, Heriot (@debbiegoughhh)

Amy Lee: a cover star? Consider it done

throat. Always knew he was hiding something under the frizz.
Vaughn Houship, email

We all knew Claudio was a genius, Vaughn, so the leap to *evil* genius wasn't all that hard! (We should clarify that he was only talking about a picture, though…)

HELLPRAISER

I don't always pick up metal mags, but a friend mentioned there was my all-time favourite movie (*Hellraiser*) in the new *Hammer* and I couldn't resist. Even better, it's a great feature!
Dale Slater, email

Thanks Dale! We hope you stick around… we have such delights to show you.

NEW ISSUE, HU DISS

Lamb Of God have been releasing the same album for years now, but they still get a cover. What happened to *Hammer*'s love for The Hu? Really disappointed to see they were just a flavour of the month to you guys.
Kye Li, email

Sorry to disappoint Kye, but things just didn't quite line up for a Hu cover story this time. But that doesn't mean we aren't still sounding the trumpets for how brilliant they are! Did you catch our six-page feature on them last issue?

GENESIS OF THE MURDERDOLLS

Whenever Wednesday speaks of Joey it feels *real*. None of that fabricated bull or the "I only now remember I loved him because he's dead" crap. The music they made together feels so much more genuine because of it. Murderdolls will always kick ass.
Dee_497, Twitter

Wednesday is about as real as it gets and we're glad you enjoyed reading Stephen Hill's excellent feature on Murderdolls, Dee!

THE BIG DEBATE

Nu metal is blazing a comeback trail, but not everybody is happy. Incubus's Brandon Boyd wasn't very complimentary about the genre, so nu metal's detractors and defenders came out in force…

HE SAID

"I know a lot of people love it, but being called 'nu metal' kinda hurt my feelings. If we made one record that fits into that genre, so be it, but I've never heard that in our music myself."

YOU SAY

The beginning of an amazing career and also the last amazing thing they did. They found their niche then threw it away for something "bigger" and more "unique" and lost the sound that got them there in the first place.
Chris Wightman, Facebook

Reading the article, it doesn't sound like Brandon is terribly hurt. It's more a comment on the insistence of assigning every band to a genre.
turner_stew, Twitter

Definitely don't consider them a nu metal band. *S.C.I.E.N.C.E.* was maybe a tinge nu metal but it was an incredible album!
Michael Morgan, Facebook

I'd be hurt too, nu metal is dog water.
Latimer46126401, Twitter

Along with Deftones I always found them getting labelled nu metal a little strange 'cause they're so sonically different than most bands with that label.
Cameron Diman, Facebook

Adding their songs to my nu metal playlist right now.
Mia Spartalis, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

DISTURBED
Divisive
"Fuck the haters and listen to Disturbed"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

IMHA TARIKAT
Hearts Unchained
"An album determined to yank black metal into its own, incendiary slipstream"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

THE OTOLITH
Folium Limina
"Ghostly hymns and atmospheric brilliance. *Folium Limina* opens a portal to another realm"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

ARCHITECTS
The Classic Symptoms Of A Broken Spirit
"Cannot wait to see these guys supporting Biffy in November"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

DISTURBED
Divisive
"How David Draiman got his groo-ah-ah-ah-ah-ve back"
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

ELDER
Innate Passage
"When doom sets the controls for the heart of the sun"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

NEW NOISE

L.S. DUNES

MCR guitarist teams up with pals in Coheed And Cambria, Circa Survive and Thursday to revive the magic of when they were young, via early 00s post-hardcore and emo

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT

"THIS FEELS LIKE when you were in high school and you started your very first band," beams Frank Iero. For more than 20 years, Frank has been the signature screamer and rhythm guitarist in My Chemical Romance, but right now he's got a new musical baby he can't take his mind off. "I'm pretty sure that we're all at home drawing the logo on our folders," he says, brimming with excitement for his new band, L.S. Dunes.

Initially formed as a lockdown project with his friends, L.S. Dunes quickly became a revival of passion and a creative lifeline for those involved. Each bandmember was raised in the mid-00s US alternative scene – Frank's fellow guitarist Travis Stever plays in Coheed And Cambria, vocalist Anthony Green earned acclaim with Circa Survive, and bassist Tim Payne and drummer Tucker Rule were founding members of emo legends Thursday.

They've known each other for more than two decades and had occasionally collaborated in the past, but when they began exchanging "scraps of ideas" during the pandemic, they soon realised they had something special on their hands. "This became a main thing for us the minute we started sending each other music," says Travis. "We were like, 'OK, this is what we were missing in life.'"

The band's debut album, *Past Lives*, is scrappy, low-fi and angsty, embodying the overenthusiastic energy of teens jamming in their high-school garage. The five members of L.S. Dunes are used to amping up the drama of their music, and their first two singles, *2022* and *Permanent Rebellion*, have it in spades. On the latter, vocalist Anthony Green sings, *'Tongue-tied, in distress / Buried in your favourite dress'*, before erupting into a cathartic hardcore chorus. Lyrically, the song is reminiscent of early My Chemical Romance, while the flood of feeling harks back to Thursday's live presence.

Mostly, the album is stripped back and raw. Songs such as *Grey Veins* and *Past Lives* sound like contemporary rock anthems, fuzzily building to euphoric choruses. "There's all these dynamics in L.S. Dunes where all the bandmembers are trying things that they haven't tried in other bands we're in," explains Travis. These tracks are a far cry from the progression and technicality of Travis's original band, Coheed And Cambria, but what both projects share is an ear for bringing out unconventional melodies.

These unconventional melodies are where their "honorary sixth member" comes in. On *Past Lives*, L.S. Dunes employ the help of long-time Anthony Green producer and 21st-century punk legend, Will Yip (Turnstile, Quicksand, Code Orange). Throughout, Will flexes his unique ability to turn the strange into picture-perfect alt rock. "He put his spin on it. Flipped a verse here and really moulded it into something," explains Tucker.

"I don't think this record could have been made with anybody else or any other way," Frank adds. "I've been chasing a record to sound this way for a very long time."

When *Hammer* speak to Frank, Travis and Tucker, L.S. Dunes have only played one show as a band. But in the same way the music-making process gives back to their creative minds, playing live has fired up a sense of exhilaration the members haven't felt in years. "It felt really good being in a scenario where I could feel some danger," says Travis. "I could feel some insecurity about what I was playing and a little stage fright."

"I've noticed this a lot and it's a thing we've tried to remedy with My Chem," adds Frank. "When you're on tour and you have a set of 12 songs you're playing each night. It's the best you'll ever be with those 12 songs, but the worst you'll ever be as a musician, because you're not moving those creative muscles."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Five punks falling in love with music all over again

FOR FANS OF: Thursday, Can't Swim, Circa Survive

LISTEN TO: *Permanent Rebellion*

L.S. Dunes has reignited a sense of danger for these five friends

PRESS/ZACHARY SPANGLER

That's not to say that the members don't love their old bands. They do. But lightning seems to have struck them once again. Like a yoga retreat for jaded musicians, L.S. Dunes has given back more than anyone could have expected, especially amid times of enormous uncertainty and emotional drain.

"L.S. Dunes has been a gift since minute one. Not only reconnecting with all these guys that I've been friends with forever, but meeting each other's kids. We're in each other's lives now and we have something that lasts forever," says Tucker. "It's given so much life to each and every person in this band. I can't even explain how great that feels."

"THIS FEELS LIKE BEING IN HIGH SCHOOL AND STARTING YOUR VERY FIRST BAND"
FRANK IERO

And what of L.S. Dunes' future? Well, the members don't just see it as a side-project but a fully fledged band, regardless of how popular it is. They're more than prepared to keep this going alongside their other titan projects and world touring commitments because, to them, this is too life-affirming not to. They're punk lifers, and they want to feel this way forever.

***PAST LIVES* IS OUT NOVEMBER 11 VIA FANTASY. L.S. DUNES TOUR THE UK IN JANUARY**

NEW NOISE

KASSOGTHA

It's a case of all or nothing for this Swiss prog-death powerhouse – stress, sweat and scars be damned

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURES: ASKAN KNUPERTELLI

THERE COMES A point for every band where it's time to get serious and think about the long-term, and for Swiss prog-death act Kassogtha it quickly became apparent that their second album was do-or-die. If their 2017 debut suggested the band could be contenders, new album *rEvolve* screams it from the rooftops: a bigger, bolder, more ambitious slice of brutality as finely crafted as the timepieces for which their country is renowned.

"I think the key was how we pushed ourselves and got way out of our comfort zone," says vocalist Steph Hugnin of this creative leap. "Each of us went through the 'Oh wow, this is really hard, I don't know if I'm going to make it… but let's make it happen anyway!' stage at least once. We simply told ourselves we wouldn't put any limits on anything and we experimented thoroughly, without judgement."

This sentiment rings true throughout *rEvolve*'s many winding pathways, from metronomic savagery through to spacious expanses and melodies that could stir the most withered heart. This said, though, it wasn't necessarily easy.

"The writing process took quite some time and was mentally exhausting for me," says guitarist Morty Baud. "I went through a lot of different moods and mindsets, from feeling amazing and proud of my work, to feeling like shit and thinking I'd never write anything good again."

Steph concurs: "It was a difficult album to write," she says. "It was a way for me to exorcise a lot of pain and bad times from a difficult period of my life."

This said, *rEvolve* does suggest a silver lining. "I wanted to end on a more positive note," says Steph. "To show that despite all the difficult parts of life, we can get through it and find hope again… although not without scars."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Precision-tooled death metal with extra groove and melody

FOR FANS OF:
Gojira, At The Gates, Meshuggah

LISTEN TO:
Drown

***REVOLVE* IS OUT NOW VIA KLANG MACHINE MUSIC**

1914

Anti-war Ukrainian metallers issue their dispatches from the trenches

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL • PICTURES: MAY LEE

"EVERY UKRAINIAN IS now anti-militarist and anti-war. It's just that a huge part of us had to drop everything and go to defend our land." Dmytro Ternushchak, vocalist for Ukrainian blackened metallers 1914, doesn't mince his words. Formed in 2014, his band were singing about the horrors of war long before their own country was invaded, drawing influence from stories and accounts from soldiers in the First World War to narrate stories of "ordinary people thrown into the imperial meat grinder of war."

While those themes now hit closer to home, Dmytro points out Ukraine's current predicament is nothing new, either. "Our country has been at war with the aggressor for eight years," he says. "It started not half a year ago, but in 2014. The whole world pretended that nothing had happened, that they were not worried when Crimea and Donbas were annexed from us, when thousands of our soldiers were killed."

1914's latest album, *Where Fear And Weapons Meet*, excoriates those who glorify war or stand idly by. From *Fn .380 ACP#19074*'s battle cry of *'Welcome to Sarajevo!'* and its portrayal of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand that led to the outbreak of the First World War, to the sludge-laden *Pillars Of Fire (The Battle Of Messines)*, 1914 also make it clear that they hold on to hope.

"We hope that death will recede and somewhere out there, peace, victory, and a peaceful life await us," Dmytro says. "Children laughing and playing in parks without fear of being torn apart by Russian missiles."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Sludgy, blackened metal with a serious case of trenchfoot

FOR FANS OF:
Behemoth, Fleshgod Apocalypse, Sabaton

LISTEN TO:
Fn .380 ACP#19074

***WHERE FEAR AND WEAPONS MEET* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM**

ALL PRESS

GOSPELHEIM

Manchester's morose misfits court blasphemy by fusing BM and goth

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS • PICTURES: SHIRLAINE FORREST

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Blackened goth'n'roll with elements of post-metal and blues

FOR FANS OF:
Tribulation, Dool, Grave Pleasures

LISTEN TO:
Satan Blues

THEY SAY HINDSIGHT is 20/20 and, in hindsight, 2020 was probably not the best year to start a band, as dark rockers Gospelheim learned. But after an eight-year break from playing in extreme metal bands, Portuguese singer/songwriter Ricardo made his return to music, taking cues from the likes of Tribulation and Unto Others with debut album, *Ritual & Repetition*.

"My friends were like, 'So it's black metal with clean vocals?'" says Ricardo. "It was something I'd fantasised about for years. I love what Gaahl is doing nowadays; he gave me the courage to pursue things in that manner."

The unmistakeable goth influence in their music can be attributed to a love of Depeche Mode, Bauhaus and The Cure. That explains the eclectic sound of tracks like the catchy *Satan Blues*.

So, are they Satanists then?

"There is a lot of occult symbolism and mythology that I find interesting," muses bassist and singer Coco, "but I wouldn't put my head on a slab for it."

"I'm fascinated by the relationship between humanity and religion throughout the centuries," adds Ricardo. "Google has taken over as God now."

Touring hasn't been on the cards so far, but the pair are keen to get out and hope to support some of their favourite artists, namechecking Moonspell and Ville Valo ("I'd cry, I think," laughs Coco) alongside labelmates Dool. Fingers crossed that Manchester's self-proclaimed 'dingiest misfits' will hit the road with their delightfully blasphemous tunes soon.

***RITUAL & REPETITION* IS OUT NOW VIA PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS**

FELLOWSHIP

High fantasy power metallers offer hope and happiness in these dark times

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURES: WILL GREEN PHOTOGRAPHY

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Joyous, upbeat power metal with all the fantasy trimmings

FOR FANS OF:
Twilight Force, Sonata Arctica, Dragonforce

LISTEN TO:
Glory Days

FEELING MISERABLE? WE'LL soon put a stop to *that*. Meet Fellowship, the UK's shiniest new power metal band and – as showcased on new album *The Saberlight Chronicles* – remorselessly cheery providers of ultra-melodic posi-vibes. "We make fun, upbeat metal!" says frontman Matthew Corry. "The most important thing is to create a connection with people."

It's a bewildering barrage of giant tunes, virtuoso histrionics and symphonic sumptuousness wrapped up in an intricate fantasy concept pitting a plucky protagonist against an invading evil empire. With an accompanying digital novel, *The Saberlight Chronicles* is a riot, but the intent behind it is as noble as it gets.

"There's magic, action and a legendary sword, but the journey is an allegory for how we face mental health issues," Matthew explains.

Living proof that metal is the best therapy, Fellowship are hell-bent on raising our spirits. "We want people to leave our gigs on top of the world. If you and 500 other people are screaming *'I've always been worthy!'* eight times at the top of your lungs, then the chances are you're going to damn well feel it."

***THE SABERLIGHT CHRONICLES* IS OUT NOW VIA SCARLET**

ALL PRESS. STRAY FROM THE PATH: PRESS/GABE BECERRA

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

UNITYTX

"There's this incredible metal/hip hop group called UnityTX who have new music coming soon that is amazing. Everybody should be listening to that band."

THOMAS WILLIAMS, STRAY FROM THE PATH

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

CELTIC FROST

DANSE MACABRE: SUPER DELUXE BOX SET

NOISE / BMG

£189.99

WITHOUT THE TOM G. Warrior-fronted Hellhammer, and its successor Celtic Frost, metal's underground would look and feel very different today. The uncompromising conviction that drove them was like a bolt of lightning that hit extreme metal's Frankenstein's lab time and time again. Although the majority of Celtic Frost's back catalogue was released on vinyl in 2017, this box set is a true goldmine. Featuring the seminal albums *Morbid Tales*, *To Mega Therion* and *Into The Pandemonium* on variously coloured swirl and galaxy vinyl, it also includes another three EPs and *The Collectors Celtic Frost* 12-inch, plus a 7-inch, and a rehearsals cassette. There's also a 40-page book with new interviews and previously unpublished photos, an audio Heptagram USB, a patch, poster and an enamel badge that will leave you well and truly Mesmerized.

tinyurl.com/macabre-boxset

GUNS N' ROSES BOX SET

£434.99

The paycheque-nuking price might be prohibitive, but we can at least imagine ourselves wearing just a sweaty bandanna and a very small pair of shorts as we shriek *'You could be mine'* at this lunatic 12-LP box set.

tinyurl.com/gnr-boxset

QOTSA VINYL

£18.23-£35

Praise be – a chunk of the Queens Of The Stone Age back catalogue is available on vinyl once more. Our pick? Their fuzz-drenched 1998 debut, sadly sold out of sunny orange but is still available on classic black wax.

tinyurl.com/qotsa-vinyl

KILLSTAR AVRIL LAVIGNE TOP

£29.99

If you want people to assume you've been dead since 2003 and replaced by a body double, follow in Avril's footsteps and snag one of these skeletal, sheer mesh tops from her Killstar collection.

tinyurl.com/avril-top

DESDEMONA COAT

£120.99

We're going to assume this handsome wool coat is named after Othello's doomed spouse rather than the heavy metal-sounding asteroid 666 Desdemona, but whatever its namesake it certainly makes a *statement*.

tinyurl.com/desdemona-coat

THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST BOX SET

£64.09

One of the greatest metal albums of all time is turning 40 in style. This vinyl set contains Maiden's classic third album, plus fiery 1982 live set *Beast Over Hammersmith*. Do we need to point out how awesome this is? Eddie says no.

tinyurl.com/beast-boxset

PHOXJAW BUNDLE

£42

Bristol's Phoxjaw have returned with their maniacal second album, *notverynicecream*. Nab some threads alongside the vinyl, which comes in different ice cream-themed colours – mintchocchip or strawberries&cream.

tinyurl.com/phoxjaw-tee

WITCHES' SABBATH FLAG

£17.25

Bring a splash of arty class to your bedroom, den or Scout hut with a whopping great pennant depicting Francisco Goya's 1798 oil painting, Witches' Sabbath. Just be sure that it doesn't crowd out any of yer *Hammer* posters, eh?

tinyurl.com/witches-flag

ARCHITECTS T-SHIRT

£22.99

"He doesn't go *'BLEGH!'* anymore!" Classic symptoms of a broken record. Don't let the Architects haters get you down – rep the new album with this double-sided, sleeve-detailed t-shirt. It's organic cotton, too. Fancy.

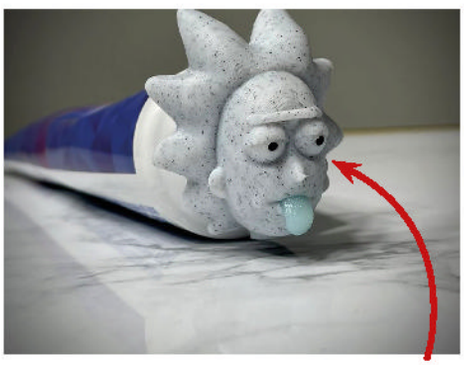
tinyurl.com/broken-tee

DEVIN TOWNSEND BOX SET

£94.23

Travis Smith's artwork is always exceptional, but he's outdone himself on *Lightwork*. Lose yourself in this gorgeous, kitchen-sink-and-probably-the-boiler-too box set, comprising three records, CDs, a Blu-ray, t-shirt, signed postcard, print and sister album, *Nightwork*.

tinyurl.com/devin-boxset



RICK AND MORTY TOOTHPASTE DISPENSER

£8.87

Ensure your pearly whites are sparkling next time you harass a minimum wage worker, like a fucking idiot, for some Szechuan Chicken McNugget Sauce. Admittedly, using this to dispense sauce would be funny.

tinyurl.com/rick-paste

TERMINATOR HEADPHONE STAND

£66.14

'I need your clothes, your boots and… your headphones?' Let Arnie listen to Fear Factory and rest your cans on his weary head. This intricately detailed bust is fully paintable – what would a pink T-800 look like?

tinyurl.com/t800-stand

WITCH FEVER T-SHIRT

£15

Next time someone with a Saxon face tattoo claims there's no good music anymore, rip open your garms like Superman to reveal this ace Witch Fever t-shirt. Punky, sludgy excellence from that there Manchester.

tinyurl.com/witch-tee

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FREAKS UNLEASHED

Two legendary bands. Two icons that defined a generation of misfits. Here's what happened when we united Evanescence's Amy Lee and Korn's Jonathan Davis to talk fame, friendship, and facing your demons

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURES: ALICIA HAUFF

On the surface, Jonathan Davis and Amy Lee don't appear to have much in common. While Korn's vocalist is best known for purging his psyche and utilising pure rage to fuel his art, Evanescence bandleader Amy is a classically trained multi-instrumentalist. To an outsider, the primal roar of Korn and the vast, intricately crafted swell of Evanescence could seem worlds apart.

In reality, the two share many similarities. Both have endured childhood trauma, which colours the music they make, giving Korn and Evanescence an honesty that connects with their fans on a massive scale. Both the bands they front have survived well beyond the nu metal tag of their early years, and are now thought of as unique artists in their own right – latest albums *Requiem* and *The Bitter Truth* charted in the Top 10 in the UK and the Top 20 in the US. Both have experimented beyond the boundaries of those bands, entering into film scoring and classical work. And, as we find out when we join a Zoom call with the pair in the aftermath of their recent co-headlining tour across the US – where they teamed up to perform *Freak On A Leash* together each night – both have an immense amount of respect and affection for each other.

We've been granted a rare opportunity to converse with two giants of the metal world. But, as Jonathan sits with his brand-new puppy on his lap – a subject that dominates the first few minutes of our conversation, and leads to Amy telling us that she's in the process of getting a kitten – today feels far more like an informal catch-up than a rock star state of address.

JD and Amy's *Freak On A Leash* duet went down a storm on their tour together

Can you remember the first time you heard each other's music?

Amy: "Gosh! I'm not sure what the first song was, but it was in high school for me!"

Jonathan: "You're already making me feel old!"

Amy: "It was like nothing that I had ever heard. We all have certain artists in our life that we hear and they have a spark, they have an impact. Korn was absolutely one of those artists for me. The music was coming from a real place. So, I became a fan right away. My favourite album was [2002's] *Untouchables*."

Jonathan: "That's so surreal for me. I still trip out on it. You have to remember that I was this green kid from Bakersfield, but we relocated to Huntington Beach. I gave up my whole life to live my dream, and I can't believe that this thing we did could be so impactful. We were just doing our own thing, these punk kids telling everyone to fuck off – and we've gone through our entire career like that! Even the name! Who names their band Korn, man?! And to hear Amy say she first heard us in high school and… now look at what she is doing!"

Amy: "That's what metal is, that's what rock is supposed to be, that nonconformist attitude. 'This is what this is supposed to look like? Well, I'm not gonna do that!' The whole idea is that you are meant to break the mould."

Jonathan: "I remember driving around in my car and their song [*Bring Me To Life*] came on, and I flipped, I thought it was cool. Listen… I hate everything, man, but I loved her voice. I liked that there was a girl doing some rock music and it was badass."

You both had to shake off the tag of nu metal around that time as well…

Amy: "I have a feeling Jonathan may feel the same, but I don't like boxes. As artists we are unique. The real value in something is being who you are and not trying to fit into a certain genre. I want the freedom to make whatever music comes out of my soul. When [2003 debut album] *Fallen* came out, I was fresh out of school and I was like a cartoon of myself; it felt like nobody got me, it was just a 2-D representation of me based on people only knowing a couple of songs. I really struggled with that."

Jonathan: "For me, we were making *Untouchables*, and that was when so many bands were coming out and jumping on the bandwagon. Now I don't mind the tag 'nu metal' – they named an entire subgenre after my band? Holy shit! That's cool! – but punk-ass, crazy Korn back then, we were like, 'What the fuck? Fuck everyone! We're going to make this insane record.' Keep people guessing. It had become a parody of itself – I don't want to be defined like that! Nowadays, I don't care, but back then, I hated it. I make the music I make… you don't call Metallica some thrash band! They're fucking Metallica! You don't call the Chili Peppers a funk rock band! They're the fucking Chili Peppers! And Korn are Korn!"

"I FOUND MYSELF RELATING TO BILLIE EILISH"

AMY LEE

Amy: "Exactly! You did it, there is only one Korn!"

Both of you seem to really dig deep into your personal lives and experiences to make music.

Amy: "That's what sticks, that's what stays, that's what really touches people. Not the bullshit. It's when you're really taking a chance and speaking from the heart. I want to feel something real when I listen to music – it's food for the soul, to feel not alone in the universe. When it comes to the bands that really stick, they're the ones that really put everything out there."

Jonathan: "For sure. Kids have bullshit detectors; they can hear that shit a mile away."

Amy: "We had to fight the power with labels and stuff

LIVE: STEVE THRASHER

Amy invites you into her world

Korny pals: Munky and Amy hanging backstage

throughout my career. It's always been a fight. Not now, I fought my fights…"

Jonathan: "And you won!"

Amy: "I did! The fights were always for the fans' intelligence. They are not as stupid as the industry thinks they are! We're going to give them something real, and it can't be fake… anything but that! That turned into fights about real strings versus synthesisers. I knew we had to spend the money to make it sound right, because I knew it was what I would have wanted as a fan."

Jonathan: "I feel the same. We were lucky, because we always told them that it was going to be our way or no way. We got into fights with magazines, fights with video directors, literal physical altercations, because we were so sure that it wasn't going to go down like that."

Amy: "*'Y'all want a single, say fuck that!'*"

Jonathan: "Exactly!"

Amy: "When [Korn's] *Y'all Want A Single* came out [in 2003], it really affected me again. I was like, 'These people get me! This is my people!'"

Jonathan: "When the managers said, 'We gotta try and get a single,' we were like, 'OK, here's your single!'"

Amy: "[To *Hammer*] They play that song every night, usually near the end before the encore, and we are all always side of the stage like, 'Oh boy! Here we go!' It's always one of our favourite songs to warm up to before we go on, too."

Is it hard for both of you to get into a place where you have to deliver such personal material every night?

Jonathan: "It's like a switch flicks in my mind and I go to that place. Honestly, I kind of enjoy it. Most of the time I'm happy as fuck, but when I hear my band, and there's a crowd, and it's loud as fuck, I go there. I feed that to the people that want it, and they purge it and they let it out and it's a huge release. I need it to get whatever is inside of me out, but by the end of the tour I'm so exhausted I can barely walk. I'm in hell, I want to go home and sleep for two weeks. But I need it, it's therapy."

Amy: "It's a release, and there are days when you don't feel like going onstage. But, without fail, when you get to the point where you walk up onto that stage and something takes over, it's purifying."

Jonathan: "Totally. I've said, 'I'm gonna go on autopilot!' so many times and…"

Amy: "Never gonna happen!"

"KORN WERE LIKE KIDS, LETTING OFF FIREWORKS"

AMY LEE

Jonathan, how difficult was it to do *Daddy* live for the first time in 2015, on the 20th anniversary of your self-titled debut?
Jonathan: "I felt like I robbed the world of doing that live for so long. I felt like I owed it to our fans that were hardcore enough to come and see us on the 20th anniversary of that album, but I don't wanna do it again. Going out and touring that record, I realised how dark it is – it's some depressing shit. As we got into *Follow The Leader*, it became more about groove. The emotion was there, but it wasn't that particular darkness we captured on that first record. In a few years, it's the 30th anniversary and… I don't think I wanna go through that again. It was difficult, and I think I was proving to myself that I could do it too."

You both had to deal with an intense level of fame early on in your careers. How was that?
Jonathan: "I became a raging alcoholic. You can't go anywhere, you can't do anything, you have to have a fucking bodyguard 24 hours a day. Crazy shit. Still to this day, it's tough, but that's what we signed up for. Everyone in Korn went a bit nuts in the late 90s."
Amy: "It was a hard adjustment. I was 21 [when *Bring Me To Life* came out], and I was often the only female anywhere. In my mind I thought, 'That doesn't matter!', but you do start to feel alone. It wasn't just about being female. Like I was talking about – it was that you start seeing the cartoon of yourself, the album cover version, the interview version. How can you feel like everyone knows me… but nobody knows me…? We've grown up and times have changed, but in the beginning it was scary. I used a lot of that as inspiration for the second album [*The Open Door*, released in 2006]. Billie Eilish's second album does that too, and I found myself really relating to a lot of that."
Jonathan: "It was hard for my little boy, Nathan. People would rush me and he would start crying, because all he knew was that 'This is my daddy and this is my daddy time.' He would cry and I'd have to say to this person, 'Yo, I'm with my kid.' And they go away pissed off. It's mentally taxing. I know Amy can relate, but most people can't."
Amy: "Yeah, you're ungrateful!"
Jonathan: "'You're an ungrateful fuck, fuck you! I'm burning your CDs!' That sort of shit."

Do you remember meeting each other for the first time?
Amy: "I do. It was at a festival, I guess. I was too nervous to knock on the door. So, I wrote a note saying how big a deal it was to have played with them, pushed it under the door and was happy to leave it at that. But they chased me down. Their security guy came and got me and brought me in. You were really nice to me, Jonathan, you were like, 'Hey come on in, sit down!' It was really sweet. Do you remember that now?"
Jonathan: "Yeah, I do now. I haven't thought about that for years!"
Amy: "Fast-forward a few years and we're doing Family Values [in 2007], and they really taught me how to have fun on tour. There was one night where I was stood by our bus, and suddenly these golf carts came out of nowhere, and all of Korn are on them and they say, 'Hey! We're gonna go let off some fireworks!' It was just like they were still kids. There was something really pure about that."

Amy was not impressed by Jonathan's 'knock knock' joke repertoire

LIVE: STEVE THRASHER

Jonathan: "That's the whole reason we become artists, so that we can remain kids. Not to conform to what society tells us we have to be. I'm a 51-year-old kid. I remember that tour now. It was us and you, Trivium…"
Amy: "I remember Atreyu was on that tour and… Flyleaf, and Hellyeah."

With Atreyu and Trivium on that Family Values tour, did it feel like there was something of a sea change happening in heavy music?
Amy: "Music has changed all along the way, and I think that is a good thing. That's what keeps it interesting and genuine."
Jonathan: "I just like anyone that is nice to me!"
Amy: "Ha ha ha! I had such a great time with you guys on this last tour! Coming back after doing that Family Values tour, what, 15 years later, it actually means more. After the pandemic, the passion from the audience to the bands and the crew, it was a moment of coming full circle. You get older and you recognise that time is fleeting, and we're very lucky to have that moment and to have each other."

What did you think of Amy's cover of Korn song *Thoughtless* in 2004, Jonathan?
Jonathan: "I LOVED it! I loved how you broke it down and really got the chord progression and the melody; I wrote that fucking thing on an acoustic guitar in my room in Arizona, when we moved to go and write [for *Untouchables*]. I locked myself in my room and I would just write all night. I came up with that riff, I played the drums on the demo, I laid it all down, and I just love that she made it so… beautiful. Then when you put it out [on 2004 live album *Anywhere But Home*], they didn't put the [Parental Advisory] sticker on it…"
Amy: "Oh yeah! They ripped it out of Walmart! Ha ha ha!"
Jonathan: "All because some uptight Christian family were pissed at the language on there!"
Amy: "It didn't have the parental sticker and they said, 'What? I thought Evanescence was a Christian band?'"
Jonathan: "Exactly, all that shit. I was going, 'Yes!' I love that."
Amy: "It's one of my favourite songs. I think the thing with metal is, it still needs to have a melody for me, and something I love about Korn is their beautiful melodies. When we started this tour I said, 'We gotta do some collab! You can pretty much pick any song!' I was really inspired by Tori Amos. She's done a million covers, and she showed me that you can take pretty much any song and give it a whole new perspective and make you hear the lyrics in a different way. She did this cover of *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, and she gave it this deep pain. And Korn have done so many cool covers over the years…"

Obviously, you did *Freak On A Leash* on the Korn *MTV Unplugged* set too, Amy. It aired in 2007. How did that come about?
Jonathan: "I do not remember…"
Amy: "You guys just asked me! I was like, 'Hell yeah, I'm gonna do a Korn song!'"
Jonathan: "You know what's funny about that? Originally, we were going to do a mash-up with Metallica as the last song, but they were in the studio and couldn't leave. My second choice was The Cure [who performed *Make Me Bad / In Between Days*]."
Amy: "I remember Robert Smith was there!"
Jonathan: "They all were! And that freaked me out, because that's my band right there. But we knew we wanted to have guests, and so we asked Amy, because of the *Thoughtless* cover, and we wanted people to hear *Freak On A Leash* stripped right down. It was so intimate, we wanted

"It has pockets!"

Great friends, sharing the love onstage

to have people hear the actual melodies. We didn't really rehearse, remember?"

Amy: "I feel like we ran through it once or twice, but I'm a practiser – I had run through it a whole bunch of times at home."

Jonathan: "Well, I appreciate that… because I'm not! Ha ha ha! I just gotta feel it!"

And not many people would have believed that metal could translate to an acoustic style in that way, either…

Jonathan: "Nobody believed we could pull it off! It was the most intricate thing we had ever done. We had all these extra musicians, strings, a glockenspiel player, the glass harmonica player. 'Korn can't do *Unplugged*!' 'Yeah? We fucking can, watch this!' We had to look at what Korn is really about, it's about me purging my demons, but we did exactly what we wanted, and we wanted to come out of leftfield. A lot of people hated it but we really didn't care!"

Amy: "Anything great that comes out of nowhere is always going to get people going, 'Nah! Hated it!' But to bring everything full circle, for me to get to do that every night on stage [on our recent tour], to do the heavy version, was such an honour. I've always wanted to do that."

Jonathan: "It was great, too. Everyone loved it every night."

Amy: "It felt like the ultimate celebration every night, right at the end of the encore after a night of so much love. I'm going to miss doing that."

"I GAVE UP MY WHOLE LIFE TO LIVE MY DREAM"
JONATHAN DAVIS

At this point, our time is up, and Amy and Jonathan quickly make plans to speak again soon. It's been a trip learning about their journeys and how they've connected over the years, and before we go, we ask both icons what they most admire about each other.

"I respect the shit out of how she can sit down in front of a piano and make such beautiful music," Jonathan immediately replies. "I respect her as a musician and a person totally."

Amy beams, before answering, "It's interesting… he was a legend before, and now we're friends. That's a weird way to start. It's amazing to me. He's a rad, down-to-earth, normal person with an amazing talent. It's that simple."

And with that, these two friends, so different on the face of it but so similar at their core, bid us farewell.

EVANESCENCE'S *THE BITTER TRUTH* IS OUT VIA SONY MUSIC GMBH, AND THEY TOUR THE UK WITH WITHIN TEMPTATION FROM NOVEMBER 14. KORN'S *REQUIEM* IS OUT VIA LOMA VISTA

LIVE: STEVE THRASHER

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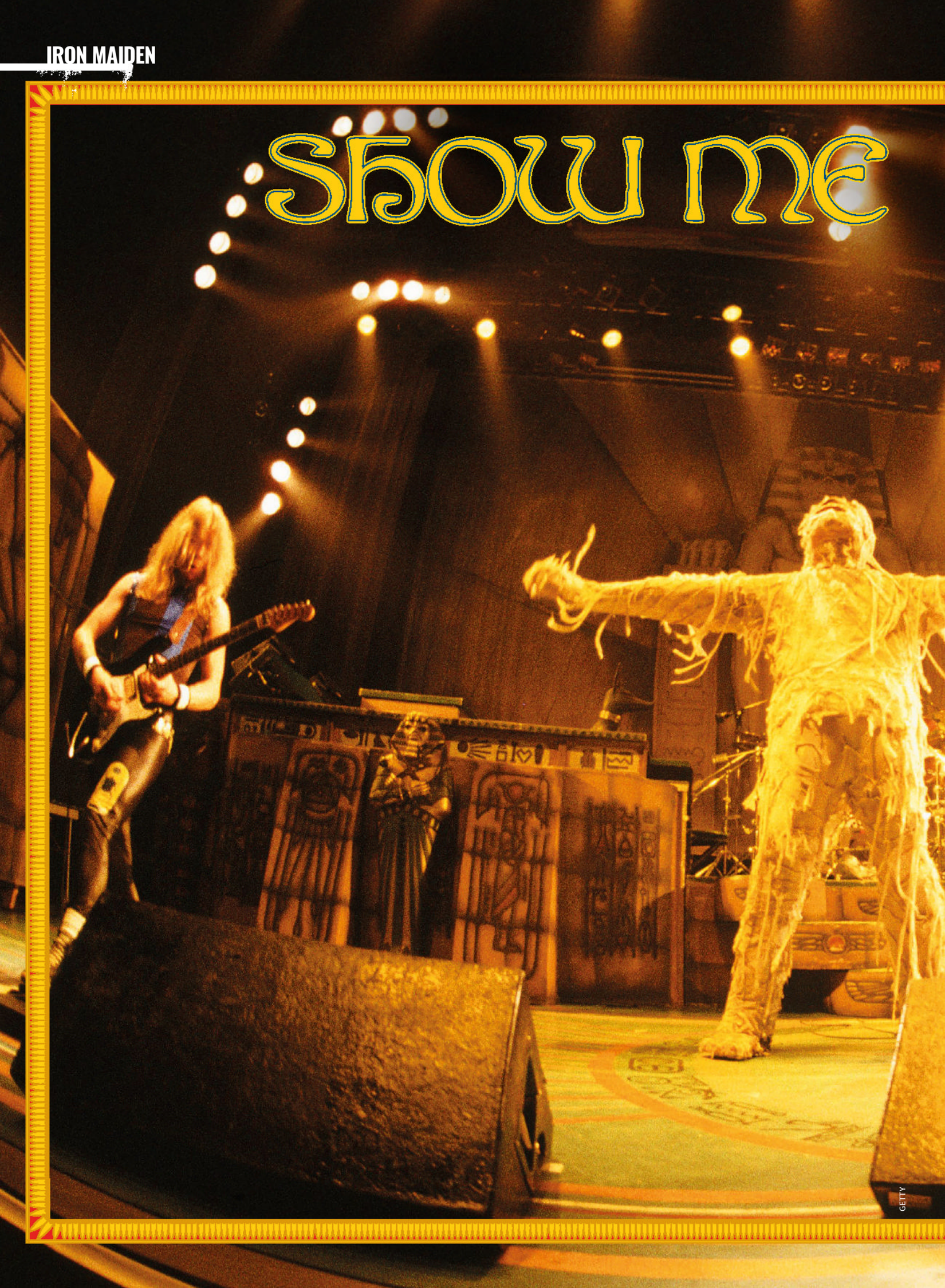

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THE MUMMY!

Pyramids, sphinx heads and the monumental *Live After Death* album – Iron Maiden's World Slavery Tour made epic even bigger. But it also came close to finishing the band off for good

WORDS: PAUL TRAVERS

In 1984, Iron Maiden were poised to take over the world. They'd been on a skyward trajectory since the arrival of vocalist Bruce Dickinson three years previously, and had laid the groundwork on the increasingly ambitious tours accompanying *The Number Of The Beast* and *Piece Of Mind*.

But the band's fifth album, *Powerslave*, would literally set the stage for their most epic undertaking yet. Beginning in August 1984 and ending 331 days and 189 shows later in July 1985, the Egyptian-themed World Slavery Tour helped turn Maiden into one of the biggest metal bands of the decade and produced one of the all-time great live albums in 1985's *Live After Death*. The tour broke Maiden in America but also pushed the bandmembers themselves to their mental and physical limits, almost bringing the group to an end. We look back on that crazy time, in words of the band and those around them.

Bruce Dickinson (vocals): "We rehearsed for the tour in a wonderfully tacky nightclub in Fort Lauderdale, and stayed in a cockroach-infested seafront motel. Soon enough, the holiday was over. It was time to emigrate to the Evil Empire, behind the Iron Curtain, as it was in 1984, to Poland to open the Powerslave tour."

Steve Harris (bass): "I didn't really think about the political side too much. I wonder whether we're being used as a propaganda tool, but at least we're providing entertainment for the kids."

Bruce: "The reception was outrageous. It wasn't just people who liked the band going crazy like at normal shows. I felt straight away that they weren't just coming out for something to do on a Saturday night – there was real change in the air everywhere. It was a moment of hope, and I felt like we were this beacon."

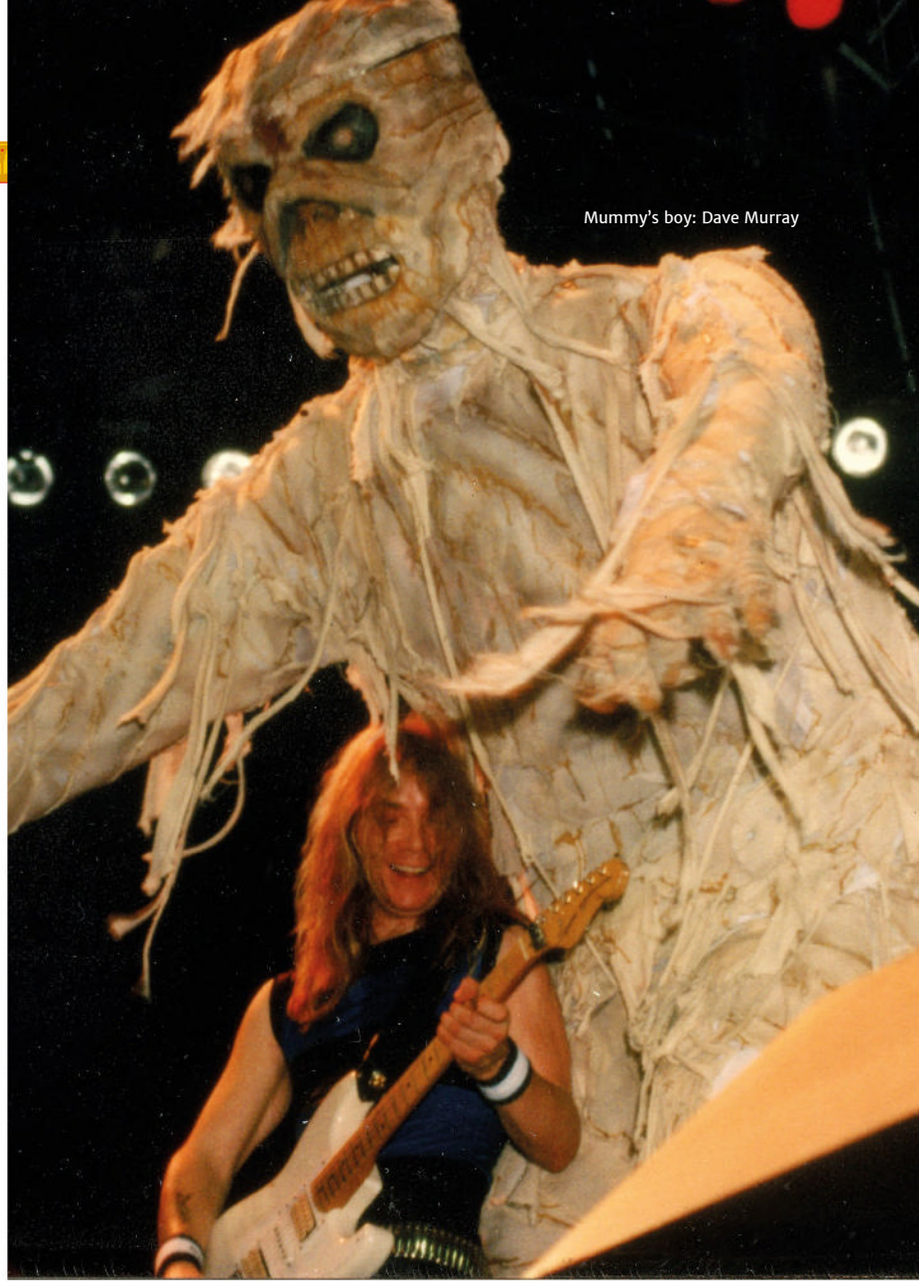
Howard Johnson (journalist present on the Polish dates): "What's really weird is that there were young soldiers in full army uniform talking their shirts off for a mosh and throwing their hats in the air for added pleasure in amongst the assorted human carnage."

Nicko McBrain (drums): "We ended up going to, well, it was supposed to be a disco, and it ended up being sort of like a converted ballroom. So there was this wedding going on at the time, about 300 people dancing the waltz as we walked in. Then these people in the club said, 'Would you like to have a jam?' 'Yes,' we said, and we did."

The World Slavery Tour's impressive, Egyptian-themed staging was already in place, but as the juggernaut moved from Europe to North America, the venues went up in size and an even bigger stage set was deployed, featuring sarcophagi, a huge Sphinx-like Eddie head looming over the stage, and a mummified version of their mascot. However, as the band's ambition grew, so did the distances and pressures involved.

Charlie Kail (stage set engineer): "[The set] took two months to build. We did things like building lighting into the hieroglyphics – those details really made it special… The whole thing probably cost £145,000 – a lot back then. But Maiden were the pioneers of those big shows in heavy metal."

Bruce: "I still think that was the best show that Maiden ever put on. It was just the right combination of epic stuff, but it wasn't too overblown and it wasn't so hidebound by the sort of technology and loads of hydraulics and inflatable things that occurred later, all of which had the possibility for Spinal Tap-type fuck-ups on a regular basis."



Mummy's boy: Dave Murray

Charlie: "There were some groundbreaking special effects, like the Eddie-on-a-stick. At one show, they parked the cherry picker too near the stage, and when the big reveal happened, all you could see was Eddie's head bobbing up and down behind Nicko McBrain. I could feel [Maiden manager] Rod Smallwood's eyes boring into the side of my head."

Bruce: "Virtually everybody I know who's seen one of our shows expects to see some sort of phenomenon that's going to corrupt the morals of their town. What they see is 7–10,000 young kids having a great time, enjoying themselves, with a show that delivers a lot of value for money."

Adrian Smith (guitar): "When we first started out in America, we went from one bus to two buses to seven buses… so things do become more comfortable. More comfortable than when we first toured the US with Judas Priest in '81! We don't have to sleep on our luggage anymore."

Nicko: "Some people do sort of crack underneath the pressure of being on the road constantly and living out of a suitcase. I sometimes don't even know what the day is – I maybe know the date."

Adrian: "It got on top of me a few times and when we hit America things really kicked in with booze and drugs, using it as a crutch."

"I STILL THINK THAT WAS THE BEST SHOW THAT MAIDEN EVER PUT ON"

BRUCE DICKINSON

DEAN MESSINA / FRANK WHITE PHOTO AGENCY

Tomb with a view: Dave Murray, Nicko McBrain, Bruce Dickinson, Steve Harris, Adrian Smith

ALAMY

Iron Maiden roared into 1985 with an appearance at the inaugural Rock In Rio in Brazil. They played on January 11, the opening night of the now-legendary festival, where they were second on the bill below Queen.

Adrian: "It's very difficult to do anything in Rio because the fans are very passionate, and even back in the first Rock In Rio they were outside the hotel, and we couldn't go out. Even when we sat out in the balcony having breakfast, there'd be people in the buildings taking photos and looking at you through binoculars."
Bruce: "We conquered an entire continent overnight with that one show."
Adrian: "It wasn't as well organised as it is now – back then it was a bit chaotic."
Bruce: "Hot and bothered, I wrenched the guitar off, over my head, and split my forehead open on its wooden edge… [A roadie] looked carefully at the wound. 'Rod says can you squeeze it and make it bleed some more,' he said. 'It looks great on the telly.' Next day, the picture was front-page news: sweaty, bloodstained me… and 300,000 new Iron Maiden fans."
Adrian: "We were touring in New York state in the winter and it was 10 foot of snow everywhere. Then we went down to Rio and it was hot and we were partying – we came back and all got sick immediately. But Rock In Rio, that was a very exciting time."

Maiden had been on the road for almost six months by the time they played Rock In Rio, but there were still another six months left of the tour. A four-night stint at Long Beach Arena in Orange County, California in March 1985 would – along with earlier shows at London's Hammersmith Odeon – provide the basis for the *Live After Death* album.

Steve: "We wanted to record all of [*Live After Death*] from Hammersmith but we ended up recording three sides from LA because by that time we were just playing that bit better."
Malcolm Dome (journalist who saw the Long Beach shows): "I'd seen the band at Hammersmith Odeon the previous October, and that was impressive. But as the lights dimmed, the crowd erupted, and you knew [Long Beach Arena] was going to be a different level of hysteria… This was Maiden elevated to the stature of the biggest bands in America."
Adrian: "The worst part is [when] you've been on the road for six months and you realise you've got another six months to do. It's like doing time. You're kind of in your own cell anyway, a little cocoon – either in a plane or a hotel or a bus, and there's security guards. It cuts you off from real life."
Bruce: "At no point on the tour did we ever get to the point where anybody hated each other. We held that end of it together very well. Because we all realised what each of us was going through, and if someone threw a wobbler – which we all did at some point – it was, 'Shall we leave the ▶

Maiden killing it live, under the watchful eye of Eddie

room and let him wreck the place and come back later?' Because everyone was going through it."

Steve: "That tour fried everybody, and [Bruce] in particular. Christ, he had to get up and sing six nights a week for 13 months, and that took its toll. Our schedule then was insane. It wasn't like anyone twisted our arms, we were totally up for it, but perhaps we took on more than we could deal with."

Bruce: "It was the first time I really thought about leaving. I don't just mean Maiden, I mean quitting music altogether. I really felt like I was pretty much basket case material by the end of that tour, and I did not want to feel that way. I just thought, 'Nothing is worth feeling like this for.' I began to feel like I was a piece of machinery, part of the lighting rig."

Rod Smallwood (manager): "We should've stopped sooner. It was probably one of many mistakes I've made. But, you know, it was really hopping for us then and I was impatient. The jungle drums were summoning more and more people, and we wanted more."

Iron Maiden did survive the tour and became one of the biggest metal bands in the world on the back of it. It was not without cost, however. As well as the personal toll it took on individual members, it opened the first few cracks that would eventually see Bruce quit the band.

Steve: "We were never obsessed with breaking America. We always planned to come out here and give everything we'd got, and they'd either like it or they wouldn't. Fortunately for us they liked it. In fact they bloody loved it."

Bruce: "It felt like the world had just shrunk. We'd sort of conquered everywhere. Not just played, but really had an impact. But it was hard work. The World Slavery Tour was great, but on a personal level I thought, 'This is all well and good, but I can't be doing with another 13-month tour.' It did my head in. I ended up taking a back seat creatively on the next album [*Somewhere In Time*] because I was basically fried."

Steve: "The stuff Bruce was coming up with [for *Somewhere In Time*] wasn't us at all. He was away with the fairies, really."

Bruce: "I came very close to quitting music after the Powerslave tour. I was in no mood for any more backstage politics or solitary confinement in tour buses or gilded cages. I didn't expect others to understand, because I'm sure for many it might seem like the ultimate dream, but I wanted more than the challenge of standing still successfully."

Nicko: "I'm really surprised we got through that tour… When you get to that stage, it's just not fun any more; it's becoming too tedious or too difficult, emotionally. I mean, it nearly destroyed the band."

Steve Harris onstage at Nakano Sunplaza Hall, Tokyo on April 14, 1985

"I'M REALLY SURPRISED WE GOT THROUGH THAT TOUR. IT NEARLY DESTROYED THE BAND"

NICKO McBRAIN

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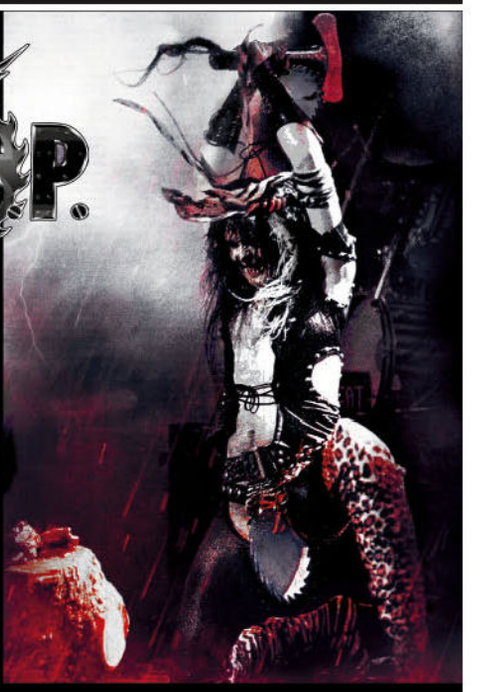

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Can TikTok save metal?

Metal is long overdue a mainstream revival. With its viral hits and vibrant community, TikTok could be the game-changer it needs

WORDS: LIZ SCARLETT

PRESS/JIMMY HUBBARD

A weird thing happened in September 2022. *Mary On A Cross*, a three-year-old Ghost song that originally appeared on the B-side of 2019's *Seven Inches Of Satanic Panic* single, entered the US Billboard Top 100, unexpectedly giving the Swedish band their biggest hit yet.

Its belated success was down to one thing: TikTok. A few weeks earlier, a TikTokker named @editingtherapy had used a slowed-down version of the song to soundtrack a compilation of scenes from *Stranger Things*. The connection to the hyper-successful Netflix show pulled people in, but it was *Mary On A Cross* that caught their attention. On the back of its inclusion in the original clip, the song itself soon went viral, eventually appearing in more than 300,000 videos and clocking up a staggering one billion hashtag views.

"I think it was my daughter who spotted it first," Ghost frontman Tobias Forge tells *Metal Hammer*. "She said, 'I heard *Mary On A Cross* on TikTok.' She's done that before with other songs. Then I was summoned to a label meeting and they were like, 'Are you aware of what's going on?', and they started presenting stats.'"

Still, he remained sceptical. "I take things like that with a huge grain of salt, because I'm not a TikTok user, so I don't know what it means. I know that people listening to a streamed song does not mean they like it."

Tobias isn't the only person from the metal community arching an eyebrow at TikTok and its potential influence. Mention of the platform can elicit a range of responses, from confusion at what exactly it is to disapproval of the Gen-Z lip-syncers and influencers it's arguably most famous for.

But things are changing. TikTok's evolved into a powerful, if complex, part of the music industry. It's a tastemaker at our fingertips, something that can potentially draw attention to songs and genres that might otherwise be ignored by wider audiences – including metal.

"I absolutely think that TikTok is going to be behind the revival of metal, and we'll see metal become as popular as it was in the late 90s and the early 2000s," says Kasey Karlsen, singer with rising US band Deadlands and an active TikTokker. "It's just a matter of time before bands are literally making their careers off of it."

With one billion active users spread across 154 countries, TikTok is the third largest social media network, behind only Facebook and Instagram. Originally used mainly as a platform for short lip-sync videos, it has grown into a place where everyone from comedians and cooks to artists and therapists can create content, pushing it to the wider world through an algorithm-supported feed or via users' individual 'For You' pages.

Today, TikTok has become such an integral and powerful part of the music industry that viral hits from the app now have their own category on Spotify. There's little difference between pop radio and TikTok – the former plays songs that have trended on the app.

Viral metal and rock TikTok hits are less frequent but memorable. In 2021, Bring Me The Horizon's eight-year-old song *Can You Feel My Heart* was picked up by users, sparking a trend that involved people posing under fluorescent lights to the song's chorus. More recently, Nickelback's 2014 single *She Keeps Me Up* hit big when it was used to soundtrack thousands of "thirst trap" videos – clips that involve users dancing or posing raunchily. "Thanks for all the love for *She Keeps Me Up*," the band wrote next to a compilation video showcasing the trend. "That one was pretty unexpected!"

Bring Me The Horizon sparked a trend on TikTok, and frontman Oli Sykes is a regular user of the platform

PRESS

"IT WAS NEVER SOMETHING THAT WE PLANNED"

TOBIAS FORGE ON *MARY ON A CROSS*'S VIRAL SUCCESS

Ghost's *Mary On A Cross*, meanwhile, took on a life beyond its original *Stranger Things*-related success, with fans creating videos exploring beauty stereotypes, centred around the lyric *'your beauty never ever scared me'*. Elsewhere, individual creators and influencers can notch up big numbers on their own. Guitarist Kiki Wong, who posts a mix of skits and dazzling instrumental metal covers, has 1.3 million followers.

'Metaltok' is the unofficial name for TikTok's vibrant metal community (the #Metaltok hashtag has close to 900 million views). It's a place where users can engage with the genre by watching or making covers, memes, collaborative duets, challenges, fan-filmed live recordings, behind-the-scenes artist content, band/song rankings, and comedic commentary about the community.

Nickelback: TikTok keeps them up. Popularity-wise, we mean. Ahem

MoshTok's Erica LeAnn thinks TikTok will eventually follow Vine into the abyss

Erica LeAnn is a metal influencer and co-founder of the MoshTok account, which creates everything from memes and comedy skits to interactive challenges, and encourages conversation about music and metal culture.

"It was a shock to me how big the metal community really is on TikTok. I'm seeing all these new creators making content and a lot of their accounts are doing well, says Erica, who created MoshTok with six other influencers during the pandemic. "I'm seeing all these new creators making content and a lot of their accounts are doing well. I see a lot of memes, but also videos about stereotypes of metalheads – like the fact that we all wear black."

It's not just metal fans and independent creators who have realised the potential of TikTok. A growing number of more clued-up bands are active on it, among them Korn, Evanescence and Bring Me The Horizon. BMTH singer Oli Sykes is a prolific TikTok creator, using the platform to

Up the Irons! Even Maiden are on TikTok

generate an intimate space for fan interaction by 'duetting' or live-reacting to fan-created videos, as well as by posting behind-the-scenes clips relating to his band.

Surprisingly, Iron Maiden have an active presence on TikTok, albeit via their digital team. Still, it shows an awareness on the part of the veteran band of the app's value in bridging the generation gap and reaching a potential new audience.

It can also be a powerful tool for new bands. Deadlands singer Kasey Karlsen joined TikTok earlier this year, shortly after the band formed in Long Island, New York. To appeal to her audience, Kasey uploads video covers of various metal songs by the likes of Motionless In White, Asking Alexandria and Beartooth (her biggest cover, *Diary Of Jane* by Breaking Benjamin, has been watched by more than 750,000 people).

"I try my best to pick bands that are influential for us, and I'll kind of just use those to my advantage," she says. "In the beginning of a video I'll mention we have a show coming up, or when we have merch, and if people are interested enough in the TikTok cover I create, they go right to our bio."

This approach is working for Deadlands. "TikTok has given us about 14,000 monthly listeners for a band that just started seven months ago," explains Kasey, who now has more than 200,000 followers. "We've had over 100,000 streams on our new EP [*Sentence Of Myself*] and first single [*Crushed*]. It's crazy to me."

TikTok videos can become successful for multiple reasons, but it's ultimately human emotion that is the key to driving popularity. If a video is relatable or inspires a strong reaction, then the viewer will be more attached to the soundtrack behind it, driving them to listen to the accompanying song via streaming services. Often, as in the case of Ghost, the band themselves don't need to be involved in making it happen.

"That was never something that we planned," says Tobias Forge. "Even the label said so: 'We wish we did this for you, but we didn't do shit.'"

Yet despite its clear usefulness for bands and fans, many in the metal community remain suspicious of TikTok. "I think people are stuck in their ways," says Kasey. "They're used to having the traditional way of finding music on Spotify or YouTube, but they don't want to get on a platform just for the virality of it."

TikTok users are drawn in by Kasey Karlsen's covers, and stick around to check out her band, Deadlands

"TIKTOK IS GOING TO BE BEHIND THE REVIVAL OF METAL"

DEADLANDS SINGER KASEY KARLSEN

Ironically, even some TikTok users view the platform as a passing trend – or at least a stepping stone to something bigger and better. "I think TikTok is going to follow [now-defunct short-form video-sharing platform] Vine," says MoshTok's Erica LeAnn. "It's gonna run its course and then eventually there's going to be a new platform that offers something even more unique than TikTok, and everyone's gonna go run over there."

Whether TikTok sticks around or not remains to be seen, but right now it's giving a helping hand to metal bands and making it easier for the world to discover heavy music. It's a fan club, digital tastemaker, social media app and promotional tool all rolled into one, offering more exposure and opportunities to metal musicians and fans at a time when it's needed more than ever.

Despite his scepticism, Tobias Forge recognises the part TikTok has played in the success of *Mary On The Cross*, and the wider benefits that come with it. "We attracted so many new people who got sucked into this and fell into the rabbit hole of everything that we created," enthuses Tobias. "And that's a great thing because you always need more people." PRESS

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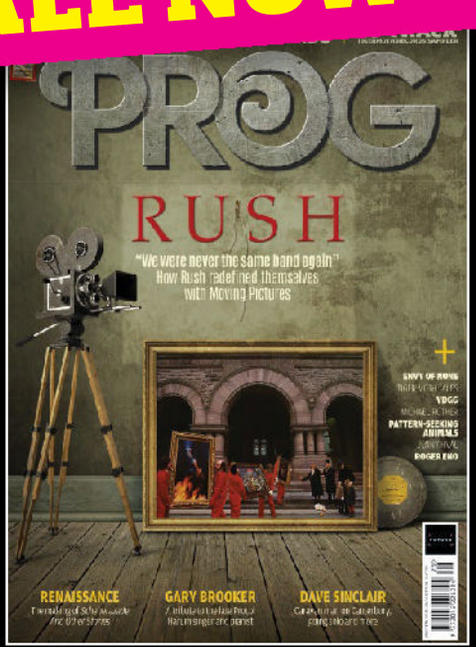

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THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

CRONOS

Dating witches? Performing occult rituals? Creating extreme metal? It's all in a career's work when you're the founder of the one and only Venom

WORDS: PAUL ELLIOTT • PICTURES: ESTER SEGARRA

It was in 1980 that the teenage Conrad Lant took the name for which he'd become famous. As the bassist and vocalist in Venom, a band on a mission to create the heaviest and scariest music ever heard, he knew that he and his co-conspirators, guitarist Jeff Dunn and drummer Tony Bray, required demonic aliases to match the darkness of their devil-worshipping songs.

The solution lay in astrology and ancient mythology. Born on January 15, 1963, Conrad's star sign is Capricorn, and as he explains now: "My planet is Saturn, and the Greek god of Saturn is Cronus. So for me it was obvious."

With Conrad as Cronos, Jeff as Mantas and Tony as Abaddon – the latter two names drawn from Anton Szandor LaVey's occult bestseller, *The Satanic Bible* – Venom rose out of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal to define a new form of extreme music immortalised in the title of their second album from 1982: *Black Metal*.

Forty years on from that landmark, Conrad is the sole remaining member of the classic Venom line-up, while Jeff leads a rival act, Venom Inc., which until recently also featured Tony.

Speaking to *Hammer* from his home in Northumberland, close to Newcastle, the city where Venom formed, Conrad talks at high speed and in thick Geordie tones as he relates the story of his life. "It's nice and quiet here," he says, laughing. "And I've got my *Metal Hammer* award on the mantelpiece – pride of place!"

The classic Venom line-up (left to right): Tony 'Abaddon' Bray, Conrad 'Cronos' Lant, Jeff 'Mantas' Dunn

Let's start with your introduction to heavy music. Which bands got you hooked?

"In the late 60s, early 70s, it was Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. Those early Sabbath albums really did something to me. But really, Status Quo was the first band where I thought: I can properly relate to this. I loved all the denim and the hair and the way they played – heads down! When I was 11, Quo did six nights at Newcastle City Hall and I saw every show."

Were you a rowdy kid, a teenage delinquent?"

"I do believe I was! Getting expelled was pretty normal. But at my school, one of the sports we used to do was pugilism. We used to beat the shit out of each other as part of the curriculum! You learn to stand up for yourself, and I think that's something I carried into Venom with the attitude: if you don't like it, fuck you!"

"STATUS QUO PLAYED SIX NIGHTS. I SAW EVERY SHOW"

You were 16 when you joined Venom in 1979, but you started out as second guitarist. The singer was Clive Archer, whose stage name was, blasphemously, Jesus Christ!

"Clive was a chilled guy, very shy, but great onstage. Big and tall, with long blond hair down to his arse. He wore make-up like Alice Cooper – white face and black eyes. A few months after I joined we had a gig at this church hall and the bass player bailed on us, so I borrowed a friend's bass and told the rest of the band, 'We can still do the gig, I'll just play guitar on the bass!' I plugged into my Marshall stack with all my fuzz pedals and that's how my 'bulldozer bass' style was born."

After 'Jesus' left the band, you became the frontman. Who was your role model for this?

"I always wanted to carry the Ozzy thing to the nth degree. I was always reading up on Satanism and demonology and witchcraft. I went out with a girl who was in a witch coven and that sparked something in me. I loved Sabbath, but I realised that they'd only touched the tip of the iceberg. This could go so far. Ozzy was singing about being chased by the Devil. I thought: I'll be the Devil!"

How far did you take it with all that occult stuff? Did you participate in rituals?

"I've been part of rituals that are relatively harmless. Ringing a bell and saying an incantation. And really, it's for wellbeing. I was interested in what witches believed with Wicca and the druids, and how they related to the elements – the Sun, the moon, the stars. It blows my mind when you think of the Catholic church and how paranoid they were to paint these religions as evil when they were actually a positive force based on goodwill and peace. But of course, that's not what I was doing with Venom. In my lyrics I was basically taking the God squad position and saying, 'OK, let's say it's true. Satan is on his throne and he's burning souls and he's gonna come and get you and stick a hot spike up your arse!' So let's really push that – because it sounds fucking amazing! And you know, when I see bands today like Behemoth or Dimmu Borgir, that's where I wanted to go, but it wasn't possible back in the 80s. I love the imagery of where they're taking it now, because it's following on from all the ideas I had and still have."

One of the biggest influences on Venom's music was Motörhead…

"Yeah, of course. I mean, fucking hell – you don't get a more rock'n'roll band than that! And we were able to grab the Motörhead audience. We grabbed the punks and the metalheads. I was 14 when punk came along, and that was another lightbulb going off in my head. I really couldn't swallow the political side of punk: *'God save the Queen, the fascist regime.'* And I wasn't going to put safety pins in my nose. But I liked the idea of the big middle finger, which was what punk was. When rock became all, 'Ooh, baby' with a sock down your pants, I said, 'Fuck this!' But I thought: if I take the rock image and the punk attitude, then you have a metal band who don't give a shit."

When Venom's debut album, *Welcome To Hell*, was released in 1981, *Sounds* writer Geoff Barton hailed it as "possibly the heaviest record ever allowed in the shops for public consumption". Was that everything you'd dreamed of?

"It was brilliant, and just what I needed at that time, a real confirmation of what I was doing. Geoff Barton was very helpful at the beginning of our career, because nobody else

PRESS

was giving us a fucking inch. When we made our first demos, I sent them off to every record company and I got a letter back from EMI where all it said was: 'FUCK OFF!'"

In 1982 came *Black Metal*. The music was so powerful, the title so evocative, it became one of the most influential metal albums of all time. Is this Venom's definitive statement?
"I think so. But at the time you didn't have time to think, it was all moving so fast. We made *Welcome To Hell* in three days. *Black Metal* was six days of recording, one day mixing. When we did the song *Black Metal*, I said, 'Just for laugh, let's play it as a fast as we fucking can' – and that was the version that made the album."

Venom had a huge influence on thrash metal, and in the mid-80s you had Metallica and Slayer as opening acts on tour. Did you view them as kindred spirits? A threat? Maybe a little of both?
"I hoped they'd be big, because they were good bands, friends at the time, and it was fun on the road. I hoped this scene would get bigger. I wanted everybody to love this music, and the heavier the better. But I never would have thought that Metallica would have had the success that they've had. They've had some shit albums – they'd have to admit that. But the first three albums, fucking great."

You've said that Metallica's *Whiplash* ripped off the riff in Venom's *Witching Hour*, but surely Slayer owed a greater debt to you?
"Well, a few years back I was hanging out with Tom Araya at a Slayer gig in Glasgow when he got a phone call from his son, who must have asked him who he was with, because Tom said, 'I'm sitting with the guy whose career I've been copying for my whole life!' Tom is great, man!"

Back in those crazy days of the 80s, was it all sex and drugs in Venom?
"It was for me! Jeff just wanted to go back to his hotel room for a cup of tea. But fucking hell, I wanted to live that life! I wanted to do that whole rock'n'roll thing, shagging a bird over the back of the tour bus. How can you be a real rock star if you don't do it all?"

Jeff Dunn quit the band in 1986. You left later that year to form the band Cronos, while Tony Bray kept Venom going, with various line-ups and little success, until 1992. Looking back on that period, where did it all go wrong?
"Apathy. Too much too fast, and then not enough commitment. We lost the work ethic. So I formed the Cronos band to get away from Venom and experience a new rock'n'roll story."

In a strange twist, it was during Venom's hiatus that the Norwegian black metal scene rose to prominence in 1993. With bands such as Mayhem, Emperor and Burzum citing Venom as their inspiration, what did you make of it all?
"If I have to be 100% honest, I was in the States with the Cronos band and the guitarist had some Mayhem and Burzum stuff and what I heard was: 'Come back, Cronos!' I was doing music that was so un-Venom, because it all ended so badly. But when that whole black metal thing started in the 90s, I think I needed that perspective of getting out of Venom to see what Venom

Cronos: black metal's founding father

Venom today (left to right): Stuart 'Rage' Dixon, Danny 'Dante' Needham, Cronos

"JEFF AND TONY? DODDERY OLD FUCKERS"

really was. So I contacted the other two guys and said, 'Shall we have another shot at this and do it properly?' So we did the live album, *The Second Coming* [1996], and a new album, *Cast In Stone* [1997], but to me it still wasn't Venom. We hadn't found that thing that we'd lost, and I think we never will, it's gone. *Welcome To Hell* and *Black Metal* are part of that era, and there it shall stay."

On a purely musical level, did you admire the early Norwegian black metal?
"Definitely. It was so dark and so evil. It was the next generation. But it also created what I call the 'black metal police' – all these people going, 'This band is black metal! This band isn't!' And I love this one: 'Venom aren't black metal!' Ha ha! I just wish they'd come up with their own term, like Norse metal. That's what I say to these guys: 'You've stolen my term, but you're not really black metal, because black metal is power metal, speed metal, thrash metal, death metal – all the metals together!'"

You can laugh about the black metal police, but the Norwegian scene had a culture of violence, criminality, racism, homophobia and neo-fascism. Knowing that Venom's name was inextricably linked to that scene, what effect did that have on you?
"It was disgusting. People like that, I want to sit them down in front of TV and play the entire *The World At War* [26-episode WWII documentary] series. Watch that and tell me fascism is a good idea, you fucking idiots!"

On a happier note, this band of yours is still going strong. Can you explain why?
"You have to evolve. I can't just play *Welcome To Hell* for the rest of my life. The line-up I've got now [with guitarist Stuart 'Rage' Dixon and drummer Danny 'Dante' Needham] is the strongest I've had the since the original days. I automatically write black metal songs, but with these guys I can say, 'Can we turn this upside down and form some new shit?' It's all about trying new ideas and challenging myself as a musician."

You haven't spoken to Jeff Dunn and Tony Bray in 20 years, so the odds on a reunion are… what?
"Less than zero. I owe them nothing, and they've got nothing I want. We still get fans saying, 'The Venom Legions want the old line-up back together!' We tried in the 90s and it wasn't well received. The last thing I want to do is get onstage with those other two doddery old fuckers and put on a sub-par performance. I'm getting better album sales now, so why the fuck would I want to go back to that? I just want Venom to be great."

But after all you achieved together – changing the course of heavy music, and influencing so many great bands that followed – don't you feel sad that there's no relationship between the three of you now?
"Yeah, of course it's sad. But we had a blast, and I'll cherish those memories."

So what is Venom's place in the pantheon of metal bands?
"I think we were a catalyst. Metal needed a kick up the arse and we came along and gave people permission to try new stuff. I just wanted to be part of the story of rock'n'roll. If anything, I helped keep music alive."

And how would you want to be remembered?
"As somebody who took chances as an artist and a musician. Somebody who broke the fucking mould. I want people in the future to think, 'That band Venom was crazy! And look at the influence on all the stuff that came after them.' That's where I see my place, as part of the whole big picture."

VENOM'S *IN NOMINE SATANAS* BOX SET IS AVAILABLE VIA BMG AS A 6CD + DVD SET

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NATIVE SON

Fusing Indigenous American culture and black metal, Jon Krieger – aka Blackbraid – is becoming the biggest underground sensation of 2022

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: WOLF MOUNTAIN PRODUCTIONS

A hand-built tribal shield is mounted on a wooden wall. Next to it is a tanned leather hide and a spear big and sharp enough to bring down a buffalo, while taxidermied turkey wings hang from the ceiling. It looks like an exhibit in a museum dedicated to Native American history, but it isn't. This is the bar in Jon Krieger's house from which he does all his Zoom calls.

"I do taxidermy in my spare time," he explains, voice deep, standing shirtless in front of the camera with his black hair cascading down. "I do hides and pelts and European mounts. My whole house looks like this, but this has become my little interview corner."

Under the pseudonym of Sgah'gahsowáh (Mohawk for 'The Witch Hawk'), Jon is the singer and multi-instrumentalist behind one-man black metal project Blackbraid. Much like Jon's home furnishings, Blackbraid places its creator's heritage front and centre. This year's debut album, *Blackbraid I*, brings elements of indigenous folk music and instrumentation to extreme metal's sonic assault, while Jon draws lyrical inspiration from Native American culture and history, as well as the natural world around him.

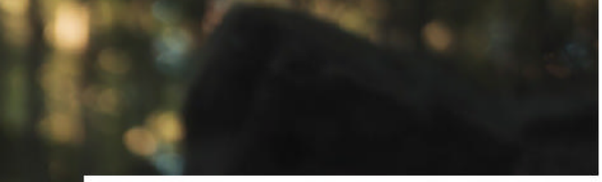
Before 2022, nobody had heard a note of Blackbraid's music. Jon only unveiled the project in April, dropping two songs, *The River Of Time Flows Through Me* and *Barefoot Ghost Dance On Blood Soaked Soil*. The underground buzz surrounding those songs as well as *Blackbraid I*, released in August, is tangible: the video for *Sacandaga* amassed 200,000 views in a month – an impressive number for an unknown artist without a big label budget behind him.

"People are bored of a lot of the black metal tropes out there right now," says Jon. "When it comes to Scandinavian black metal, I'm the biggest fan there is. But there comes a point in my mind where the dark, mediaeval type of black metal has just been done so much. It's impossible for bands to make an album in that genre and not sound like all the rest."

He's certainly been successful on that front. *Blackbraid I* sits a world away from anything his Scandinavian counterparts would release. Songs such as the 10-minute *Prying Open The Jaws Of Eternity* bring a progressive scope to the black/death metal template, while a folk influence runs through *Warm Wind Whispering Softly Through Hemlock At Dusk* and *Sacandaga*, the latter featuring Jon playing a solo on a traditional Native American flute.

Lyrically, like many black metal bands, nature permeates *Blackbraid I* to its bones – but Jon draws from his own culture, history and surroundings. *'Deep in the heart of a forgotten*

Jon Krieger: nature boy



hemlock forest, a stream flows swiftly over ancient weathered stones,' howls Jon on opening song *The River Of Time Flows Through Me*. "I don't want to brag, but there are three preserves north of my house and together they're 38,000 acres," he says with a smile.

Even more startling is *Barefoot Ghost Dance On Blood Soaked Soil*. *'Fiery drums of war pound beneath my veins! / Rape and defilement of our sacred mother / Who will stand against her desecration?*' sings Jon, his anger tangible. The song was inspired by the massacre at Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota on December 29, 1890, in which the US Army slaughtered up to 300 Native Americans from the Lakota people, effectively crushing all organised indigenous resistance to assimilation into the white American way of life.

"Before I was halfway done with the song, more modern and personal issues started pouring out. The North Dakota Access Pipeline was definitely on my mind," says Jon, referring to the 1,170-mile oil pipeline constructed in 2016 in the face of high-profile protests over fears it could pollute the drinking water of the Standing Rock Reservation, among other things. "It became an eclectic mix of my emotions, and branched way beyond just being about one event."

While Jon has no qualms talking about his culture and his reverence for nature, many of the details of his life remain a mystery. "I'm not comfortable talking about my personal life with music journalists," he says in no uncertain terms.

Here's what he does tell us. He was born in 1989 to Southern Native American parents. Shortly afterwards, he was adopted by a white family and subsequently grew up in woodland 40 minutes outside of Albany, New York. It was so remote that the next house was half a mile away.

"There was no one within walking distance," he says. "There were no other houses. There was no mall to go to, no movie theatre. And this was before the internet. I grew up with four TV stations and no videogames, so going outside was the only option. I'd spend my summers playing outside by myself."

"NATIVE AMERICANS ARE STILL HERE AND STILL THRIVING"

The land Jon grew up on belonged to the Mohawk tribe, though he was never officially enrolled into any tribe. He won't elaborate as to the reasons, but he implies that it's because he doesn't meet what is known as 'blood quantum' – a controversial rule that determines whether indigenous people can join a specific tribe depending on what percentage of the relevant tribal blood they have. Critics of blood quantum claim that it's financially motivated – registered tribe members are exempt from paying state taxes, so it's in the US government's interest to limit the number of people entitled to join tribes.

"Say you were trying to pass the blood quantum for the Comanche nation and their requirement was 55% Comanche [blood]," Jon offers as an example. "If there's someone out there who's 56% Comanche and 44% European, they'd pass the blood quantum. Whereas, say someone has a Comanche parent and a Lakota parent: that's 100% native blood, but they can't enrol with either tribe. Blood quantum is designed in ways to do exactly what happened to me, and most of us."

Nonetheless, Jon refused to let himself grow disconnected from his heritage and his culture. He remembers visiting Wounded Knee as a young child. Through powwows and his love of taxidermy, he's met and been mentored by elders of the Lakota, Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne people, who, he says, "have helped me reconnect with my culture".

His musical education started young, too, courtesy of his classic rock-loving parents. "I was listening to hard rock at six or seven – Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath," he says. "I listened to it every single day as a child. Among the very first metal bands I discovered were Metallica: in the US, they're on the radio and shit, so it doesn't really take much to discover them."

He soon graduated to increasingly extreme forms of metal. By the age of 10, he was immersing himself in Slayer and Slipknot. He began playing the guitar at 13, and subsequently joined a string of long-forgotten bands.

"I joined some metalcore bands but I didn't write any of the music for them," he says. "It was just a hobby for me: a great way to party and meet girls."

The metal and hardcore community he was part of was predominantly white, but Jon says that he never experienced racism within them. Quite the opposite, in fact. Those scenes offered a sense of unity that was at odds with the jabs he'd get in the school playground.

"The community I grew up in was as remote as it gets, so I've been surrounded by white people pretty much my entire life," he says with a laugh. "I would face issues like that at school or in sports but, whenever I went to a metal show, everybody loved each other."

What happened at school? "I'm not really one to take much shit," he replies. "I've experienced racism, but I'd never say I've been bullied. If someone tries to step to me, I'll knock them out. And that's the end of that."

When Jon speaks to *Hammer*, Blackbraid have played just two live shows, both of which he eagerly points out were sold out. He's already working on the follow-up to his debut album, and wants to push the boundaries of what he's doing even further.

"It's always been a goal of mine to incorporate native instruments into my black metal and, on the second album, I think you'll see that come to fruition a bit more," he says. "Everything is going to be bigger and longer."

While Jon insists that Blackbraid is a personal project rather than a symbol of Native American culture – "We are too vast for any one person to be able to represent all of us" – he views anybody enlightened or educated by what he does as a victory.

"When people see Blackbraid, it lets them know that Native Americans are still here and still thriving. We are not some forgotten nation."

***BLACKBRAID I* IS AVAILABLE NOW VIA BANDCAMP**

We fear nothing

In 2002, Lacuna Coil put out *Comalies*, the career-defining album that changed their lives forever. Twenty years later, they decided to give it one hell of a makeover

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURES: ARIANNA CAROTTA

PRESS

A spotlight follows Cristina Scabbia as she makes her way through the crowd. The Lacuna Coil vocalist has just asked fans if they'll sit down so she can come and sing a song in their midst, and it takes mere seconds for the entire room to oblige.

"Sorry if I kick you. Ciao! Ciao!" she laughs warmly, offering fist bumps to those perched dutifully on the floor, some of whom have travelled across Europe, and from as far as Brazil and Chile, to be here. Moments later, surrounded by camera phones, she sings a beautiful, doomy rendition of *The Ghost Woman And The Hunter*, a deep cut from third record *Comalies*, shoulder-to-shoulder with her tearful faithful.

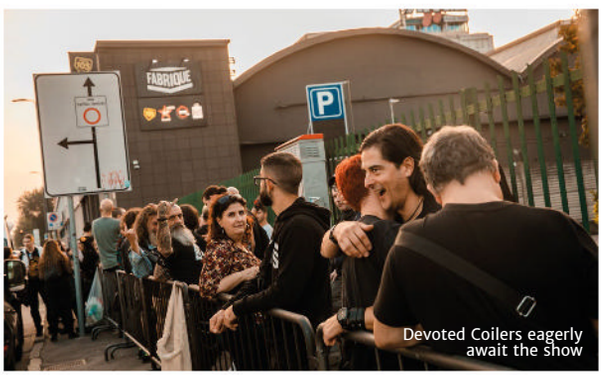
We're here at Fabrique, a 3,000-capacity venue on the outskirts of Lacuna's hometown, Milan, to celebrate the 20-year anniversary of that very album. Widely considered to be the band's masterpiece, it introduced thousands of people to their ethereal gothic sound and the serene/harsh dual vocal attack of Cristina and bandmate Andrea Ferro, setting them on an upward trajectory that, in 2022, shows no sign of slowing down. The retrospective includes *Comalies XX*, a rewrite that puts a modern spin on the original album, and the band are playing it in full tonight as part of a 26-song set.

"*Comalies* was the album that changed our career, so we couldn't put out a remaster or repackaging and let the 20th anniversary just go by without giving the importance that it deserves," says Cristina, speaking to *Hammer* over a Zoom call from her "chaotic" nerd den in Milan, four days before the show. Surrounded by toys, posters and games, she admits the combination of playing a hometown show, as well as commemorating *Comalies* and playing *Comalies XX* live for the first time, has turned her into a jumble of nerves and excitement. "We were grabbing a coffee and said, 'Why don't we rewrite *Comalies*? With the technologies that we have now, how would it sound?'"

The answer is darker and much heavier. Maintaining the atmospheric qualities of the original while adding a depth and power to their most beloved tracks, there's a new density at play that's in no small part due to Andrea's newly recorded guttural vocals. It's an approach, he tells us as we sit in a tiny office backstage a few hours before the show, intended to reflect the volatile nature of current society.

Something for everyone: *Comalies XX* and a bunch of extra hits thrown in for good measure

Cristina Scabbia: effortless power



Devoted Coilers eagerly await the show

"THIS IS EXTREME MUSIC FOR EXTREME TIMES"

ANDREA FERRO

"It's more… desperate," he says, choosing his words carefully while wincing due to a pulled muscle in his back, which sees him relying on heat patches to get him through the gig. He cites the pandemic, Putin's invasion of Ukraine and pervasive anxiety surrounding the spiralling cost of living as factors that took the music in a grittier direction. Meanwhile, in the last few weeks, politician Giorgia Meloni, whose far right ideologies have alarmed the band, has got closer to becoming Italy's next Prime Minister. "We wanted extreme music for extreme times."

The reworked album represents a leap of faith for the band, given fans consider the original to be holy ground. "I'm sure that there will be some that will argue that it should have been 'left alone'," says Matt Wrycraft, founder of long-time Lacuna fan forum and website Emptyspiral, who is here seeing the band live for the 119th time. "But the music is still uniquely Lacuna Coil. Their journey continues and I'm always excited to see what happens next."

For many fans, *Comalies* was the moment Lacuna transformed into the band they now know and love, developing a unique sound that was far more than the sum of their Paradise Lost and Type O Negative influences.

"The songs were more mature," remembers Cristina, who says everything aligned musically and visually during the creative process. "We took a lot of time to put together all the clothes, to have a specific image. We started to present as a band, as an army, for the first time."

ALL PRESS

Flower power: repping the *Comalies* album cover

In-ears? Check! We're good to go!

"...and we're blending"

Can't a girl use the bathroom in peace?!

Founder member Marco Coti Zelati is still loving Lacuna life

Heading to YouTube in three... two... one...

The album was written in Milan but recorded, completely analogue, at Woodhouse Studios in Germany. For several months, the band shared a tiny apartment above the offices of their label, Century Media, sleeping in one room in bunk beds. While their bandmates (guitarists Marco Biazzi and Cristiano Migliore, bassist Marco Coti Zelati and drummer Cristiano Mozzati) recorded the music at the studio, Andrea and Cristina worked on lyrics in the apartment, cooking gnocchi from scratch to save money, using tomatoes and oil they'd brought over from Italy.

Comalies was released on October 29, 2002. Cristina doesn't remember much about her time in the studio, but she can clearly recall the album's impact. Two songs had immediately stood out from the recording sessions, and would go on to break Lacuna Coil on the world stage. The first was *Heaven's A Lie*, the hooky, ethereal single that grabbed the ears of MTV. The second was the sumptuous *Swamped*, which Andrea tells us initially went by the working title 'Ramm No More'. "Not many people know that," he says. "For us it was a mixture of Rammstein and Faith No More."

Two years after *Comalies* was released, Lacuna Coil were booked to play Ozzfest 2004 in the US. In an instant, the bands they had listened to for years were suddenly their peers. "We were immediately projected into this new world," Cristina says, remembering the press conference in Los Angeles she attended that year to promote the tour. "I was sitting near to Judas Priest, Lamb Of God, Sharon and Ozzy. Joey from Slipknot was there. I took a picture with Zakk Wylde, holding me in his arms." She laughs. "Three surreal days."

Ozzfest won them legions of new fans. Every date of the run, they continually sold more CDs than any other band, save for headliners Slipknot. Of course, it didn't hurt that a year earlier Evanescence had crashed the UK and US mainstream with their world-guzzling hit *Bring Me To Life*, thrusting goth-tinged hard rock into the consciousness of popular culture and redefining the meaning of the female artist inside and outside alternative music. Both Cristina and Andrea agree that the omnipresence of *Bring Me To Life* represented a huge opportunity for Lacuna Coil to tap into a wider audience.

Richard Meiz laps up the atmosphere

"WE STARTED TO BECOME AN ARMY"

CRISTINA SCABBIA

"It was about time for women to flourish more," says Cristina. "I was honestly very happy about their success. Even wanting it as much as I could, from Italy we would have never have been able to change the musical world in terms of [bringing in] more females. I was like, 'Maybe something is really changing. Maybe people are realising that metal is not just, you know, dudes with a denim vest.'"

Despite having little in common musically, other than the fact there was a woman on vocals, Lacuna Coil found themselves incessantly lumped together with other gothic and symphonic-leaning bands such as Within Temptation and Nightwish, by a metal media who seemed determined to stir up drama.

"I read some interviews, and I really hope that they are fake, and one day I'll meet in person with Amy, and I am sure that she will tell me that they were fakes, in which some [Evanescence] members were actually saying bad things about us," Cristina continues. "I was just like, 'We never met. We are not jealous about your success. What's the point?' You never know about rumours because they're 99.9% bullshit."

Ask Cristina and Andrea what the legacy of *Comalies* is and they'll say the same thing: community. And you only need to look at the black-clad queue that has been snaking down

ALL PRESS

Cristina and her adoring throng

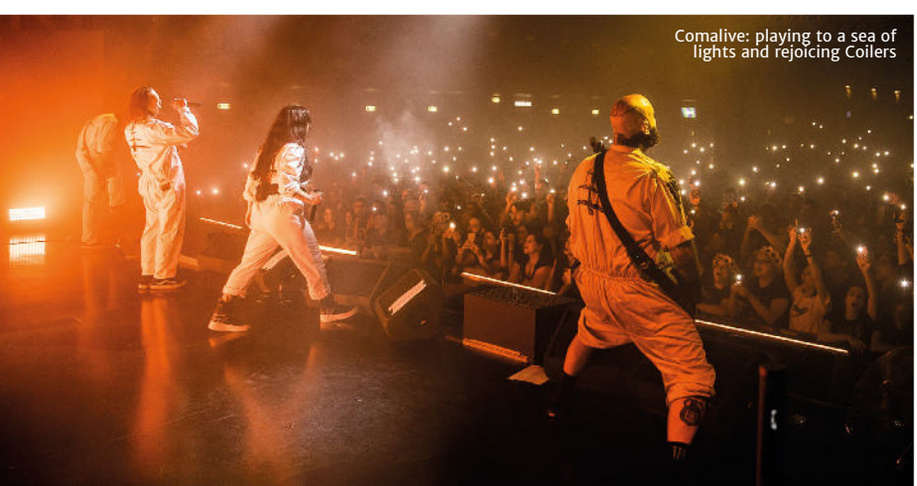
the road outside Fabrique since 8am this morning to see their point. "I've never known anything else like it," says long-time fan Dave, who flew from the UK to see the show and has formed many friendships through the band. "The best way to describe it is I think it feels like a warm blanket."

Yesterday, some of those same fans were treated to a meet-and-greet at MoonHouse Music in Milan – the place where the band wrote *Comalies* 20 years ago – and a memorabilia showcase, including the priest-like garment worn by Andrea in the *Heaven's A Lie* video, a red leather dress that fans will recognise from a million Cristina photoshoots, and even a copy of the first contract proposal the band ever received from Century Media.

"We have a very strong base of fans that have become a family to us," says Cristina. "We're really attached to them. We recognise most of them, they write to us and we answer. I can't see many new bands that have the same luxury."

The sense of community set in motion by *Comalies* is palpable later as Lacuna Coil bring their 'Comalive' show to an emotional close. Dressed in floor-length black robes and bathed in red light, the band finish on a triumphant *Nothing Stands In Our Way*, an anthem dedicated to Coilers everywhere. As they lead the room of raised fists through a deafening chant of *'WE FEAR NOTHING!'*, you know in your bones there's not one soul in the room who doesn't believe every word. It's a reminder of just how far the band have come, and a heartfelt invitation to join them for the next 20 years.

***COMALIES XX* IS OUT NOW VIA CENTURY MEDIA**



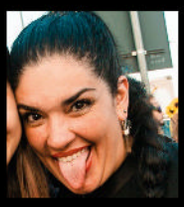
Comalive: playing to a sea of lights and rejoicing Coilers

Andrea Ferro's vocals have become grittier with time

Coil of Duty

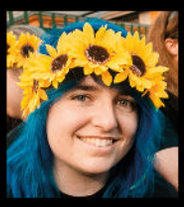
Meet the hardcore Coilers at Comalive

Alicia, 27
"I've been queuing since about 8am this morning. I'm from Chile, so it's been a long journey! They're one of my favourite bands. I've travelled to the US, too, to see them. Cristina saved me from depression by streaming on Instagram and saying, 'Never give up.' Her words are special to me."



Fernanda, 31
"I came to the concert from Finland. Every member is amazing and the live shows are crazy. The first song I heard by Lacuna Coil was *Heaven's A Lie* from *Comalies*, but I've been a big fan since *Delirium* [2016], the album when Andrea started to do more growls and there was a heavier sound."

Somnis, 40
"Lacuna Coil are my favourite band and I've followed them for 26 years. They talk to you like they're your friends; they're not famous with a big ego, which is unique. After 20 years, it's so good of them to remaster *Comalies* to this new masterpiece version."



Margot, 25
"I grew up with Lacuna Coil. I first discovered them on a random video on YouTube when I was around 10 years old, and they were my introduction to the metal world. They make excellent music, but it's not just the band, it's everything around them, the community."

THE DOOMED GENERATION

Two fans, who identify as frikis but have never self-injected, take a break at Ciudad Metal in 2018

Papo Delgado, circa 1993

IMAGE COURTESY OF JAKE HOSTETTER

In Cuba in the early 1990s, hundreds of metal fans injected themselves with HIV as a protest against the government. This is the tragic story of Papo Delgado and los frikis

WORDS: ROBERT ARELLANO

When 20-year-old Luis Enrique Delgado – 'Papo' to his friends and family – heard about the first Ciudad Metal festival and all the bands that would be playing there, nothing could stop him hitchhiking the 275 miles from his home in the Cuban city of Pinar del Río to Santa Clara, where the gig was to be held.

This was 1990, and it was a surprise that the festival had been approved. Maybe the authoritarian Communist Party that ruled Cuba saw the request from the local chapter of the national youth arts organisation as a benign plan to bring culture to the masses. And Santa Clara, located near the centre of the island, had historical significance – it was where Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's revolutionary guerillas had won victory in 1958, changing the course of Cuba's history forever.

Papo himself had endured a hard childhood. He was regularly beaten by his alcoholic father, as were his mother and younger brother. He found solace in rock and metal – Led Zeppelin at first, then Metallica, then Kreator, then whatever he could get his hands on.

By his late teens, Papo had got his ears pierced, was wearing studded bracelets, had let his hair grow long and even given himself homemade tattoos, receiving unwanted attention from the police for his troubles. By 20, he had served almost two years in prison for petty offences and unpaid fines.

On the first day of June, 1990, Papo made it to Ciudad Metal – 'Metal City' – along with 2,000 other metal fans. On the final night of the festival, as local heroes Zeus thrashed out their anthem *Violento Metrobús*, members of the crowd stormed the stage and began stagediving. Seats in the front were torn open and the stuffing ripped out of the cushions.

The police, truncheons swinging, cleared the theatre. In the street, Papo found himself at the head of a pack of fans, fists pumping. That was the point, there and then, that he discovered what he was: a leader. He wanted to take the power back for people like himself. To show them they could take matters into their own hands, as he had done.

Papo had set out for Ciudad Metal with an idea forming. There were rumours circulating of a shocking sacrifice some hardcore metal fans – nicknamed frikis, a phonetic translation of the English word 'freaks' – were making. These kids were deliberately injecting themselves with HIV, the virus that was ravaging parts of the island's population.

Cuban leader Fidel Castro had introduced a new slogan: Patria o muerte, 'Fatherland or death'. Since it looked to los frikis like the authorities had rejected them, they'd show the Cuban government their choice while remaining defiantly in their face: death over fatherland. And Papo Delgado would soon be at the centre of this new, and fatal, revolution.

By the time Ciudad Metal took place, Fidel Castro had been in power in Cuba for 31 years – first as Prime Minister and then as President. Castro aligned his country politically and financially with the Communist USSR in a struggle against a common enemy: the USA.

Technology took a decade longer to reach Cuba than anywhere in the West. In the mid-80s, with the arrival of cheap Soviet radios and cassette players, two decades' worth of rock music hit the island all at once.

The teenage Papo Delgado fell hard for metal, wearing out bootlegged Motörhead tapes and hoarding the few metal magazines that found their way through cracks in the economic blockade set up by the US.

An earlier generation of rock fans in the late 70s and early 80s had been dubbed 'frikis', but by the end of the '80s the name was up for grabs. A rising generation of metal fans grabbed it hardest. They shirked military service and hung out in city parks, they played their music loud and forged

Forever frikis: Papo Delgado and Niurka Rojas Fuentes in 1994, a year before Papo's death

Cuban thrashers Blinder at Ciudad Metal in 2018

prescriptions for pills, they hitchhiked between cities and towns and lived off whatever they could beg, scrape or steal. Papo was puro friki, and proud of it.

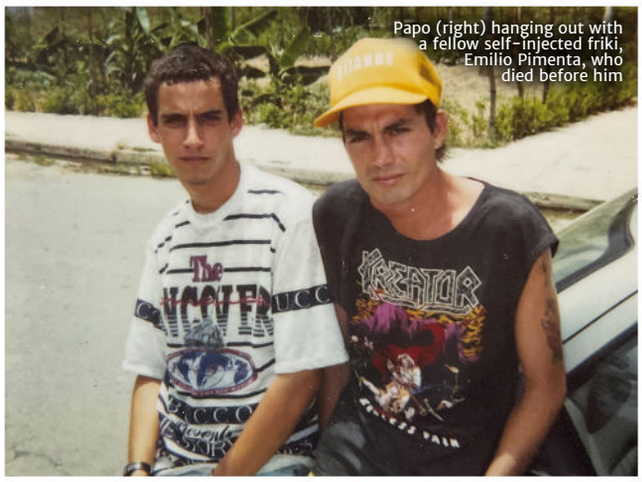
The authorities hated los frikis. Fidel Castro's brother Raul had created a new branch of the national police force to address what he and other hard-liners saw as a new threat to Revolutionary conformity: teenagers like Papo. When a friki was arrested, they might be beaten, pushed up against a wall with a bayonet or have their hair cut with a knife. If they tried to talk back, it was worse. The first time Papo went to jail, it was for stealing a tin of food. The second was for the fines that had multiplied for being a friki.

Niurka Rojas Fuentes was a country girl from Guane, two hours by train from Pinar del Río, and had moved to the city to train as a teacher at college. She would see frikis scattered throughout the streets and parks, but she had nothing to do with them until, in her fourth year in school, she met Papo.

He was cocky, charismatic and all the other frikis looked up to him. They'd given him a nickname, la Bala, or 'Bullets', the slang for pills (Secobarbital, Dexedrine, Haldol), which Papo obtained with the aid of a stolen prescription pad. Niurka and Papo began seeing each other.

A few days into their relationship, Papo told Niurka he was hitchhiking to the Ciudad Metal festival. On the road back, he stopped off to meet his childhood friend Juan Miguel,

IMAGES COURTESY OF ROBERT ARELLANO



Papo (right) hanging out with a fellow self-injected friki, Emilio Pimenta, who died before him

Some self-injected frikis in quarantine. Apart from Niurka, all have since passed away

Gerson and Yoandra, the last self-injected frikis at a sanatorium in 2017. The government reluctantly allowed them to stay after the sanatorium closed

"ALL THE LAWS WERE AGAINST US. IT WAS A LEVEL OF DISCRIMINATION COMPLETELY WITHOUT DEMOCRACY"

PAPO DELGADO

who had contracted HIV and had been admitted to one of the 14 sanatoriums set up in the mid-80s by the national medical service to combat the new virus. It was there, on June 4, 1990, that Papo Delgado injected himself with HIV.

There was a phrase among los frikis for the choice kids like Papo were making: 'La vola.' The Oath. To take la vola, they sought out somebody who was HIV-positive to procure their blood, which they would then inject into their own veins.

"I gave myself AIDS – and many others like me – because we were the most persecuted class in the entire country," Papo said. "The police fell hardest on us. All the laws were against us. It was a level of discrimination completely without democracy."

But that wasn't the sole reason Papo injected himself. Being HIV+ meant he could avoid being sent back to prison. Instead, it was a ticket to el sanatorio – the sanatorium. Life in the sanatorium shielded quarantined patients from the food shortages and power outages of what Fidel had taken to calling the "Special Period", a euphemism for the tailspin that hit the Cuban economy as the USSR began to crumble at the end of the 1980s.

When Papo returned from Ciudad Metal, Niurka was the first person he told what he'd done. He said he would understand if she chose to no longer be with him, but any doubt in his own mind had been abolished. It was a hard blow to Niurka, but she had seen how the police treated young people like him.

Five weeks after Papo returned from Ciudad Metal, less than a month after Niurka's 19th birthday, they married at a government office. Niurka took her own version of the Oath. She did not want to inject, but she and Papo knowingly had unprotected sex so she could contract HIV and be with him at the sanatorium.

For a brief time, the sanatorium was a kind of metal heaven for the pair. They had a private cinderblock cabina and could play their music as loud as they wanted. They were allowed out once a week, under close supervision, to go to the beach or the nearby Guamá River.

Papo started a metal band, Metamorfosis, with three other frikis at the sanatorium. They rehearsed his original songs like *El SIDA nos acecha y un Partido aparte también* – 'AIDS Is Stalking Us, and So Are The Commies'.

Soon, the news of what Papo and a few other frikis had started spread like wildfire across the island, largely by word-of-mouth at concerts in the cultural centre and clubs that were emerging as homes to rock and metal. Before long, hundreds of young metalheads across the island had heard of Papo la Bala, with many of them following his example by taking the Oath. Niurka later said she personally knew of 140 frikis who had self-injected with the HIV virus; she guessed there were 800-900 in total across Cuba.

For los frikis, this was the ultimate 'fuck you' to Fidel Castro and his government. It was a desperate demonstration, shocking in its stark nihilism and self-destructive simplicity. In the early 90s, before the availability of antiretroviral drugs, it was also a slow, certain suicide.

IMAGES COURTESY OF JAKE HOSTETTER/ROBERT ARELLANO

Local heroes Zeus playing in Havana in 2018

Your writer, Robert Arellano (right), meeting with Papo's younger brother, Papito (who did not inject), and Niurka earlier this year

Many young frikis, ignorant of the immutability of an act that took only an instant, did not believe the Oath was final. Heartbreakingly, some believed Fidel Castro already had a cure, and was waiting for the right time to make a big deal out of announcing it. But after five months in the sanatorium, the first one died: Papo's best friend, El Flaco. Soon there were many frikis in a serious condition and two or three deaths a day.

At the time, a couple of newspapers reported on the plight of los frikis. When the self-injected started dying, young people stopped injecting. The core identity of 'friki' reverted back to the regular metalheads, who reappropriated the identity for the spirit of rebellion it invoked. They stopped short of taking the Oath, but for the ones who had already taken it, there was no cure.

I met Papo on the first of several trips I took to Cuba in the 90s. We were the same age, our birthdays just 11 days apart. My parents had left the island for the United States following the Revolution, and he wanted to know what it was like to grow up Cuban in the USA.

When it came to taking the Oath, he didn't harbour any personal regrets. "I am going to stick it out," Papo told me. "I'm determined to see it through to the end." Still, he seemed uncomfortable with how many frightened young people had invoked his name as the inspiration for their own self-injection. The burden of becoming a spokesperson, and of the increasing fear and hopelessness in the eyes of the young frikis who looked up to him, was something he never reconciled with.

On July 15, 1995, after four years of progressive illness, Papo Delgado died of cerebral cryptococcosis – a parasitic fungus that ate away at his brain. Niurka would later outline the details of his death: how he was admitted to the hospital with a serious infection, confused, hallucinating and in great pain. The following morning, he briefly became clear-headed and told her to take care of some outstanding affairs. At 10am he went into cardiac arrest. Niurka gave him mouth to mouth, but by the time the doctor had arrived, Papo was dead. He was one week shy of his 26th birthday.

Remarkably, Niurka is still alive. She had been a slow progressor, a rare AIDS patient who had been able to hold on long enough for antiretroviral drugs to arrive. Today, Niurka's immune system is so compromised that simple skin irritations can turn into life-threatening lesions. Lately, antibiotics have been hard to come by. When I called her by phone to interview her for this piece, she choked back sobs. "All the others from that time have died," she said.

Years after Papo's death, I was involved in an interview with a prominent Cuban priest who was friends with Fidel Castro. The priest said that he had told Castro what los frikis were doing to themselves. He claimed that the leader listened, then said: "I had no idea. I believe you and I can't even believe it."

"I GAVE MYSELF AIDS BECAUSE WE WERE THE MOST PERSECUTED CLASS IN THE ENTIRE COUNTRY"

PAPO DELGADO

Is it possible that when Castro learned of los frikis and la vola, it set wheels in motion that allowed a more tolerant attitude towards metalheads and 'miscreants' that took hold in Cuban society at the turn of the millennium? Perhaps. By 2007, the government had allowed the formation of the Agencia Cubana de Rock, which promotes rock and metal concerts and festivals in venues across the island.

Ciudad Metal returned in 2000, a decade after it was last held. This year, the festival runs from November 29 to December 3. More than 20 bands – among them Tendencia, Blinder, Combat Noise and Night Of Terror – keep the original spirit alive through a PA system that booms over every city block with a din reminiscent of Soviet-era bullhorns. Nowadays at Ciudad Metal, the cops smile and chat amiably with kids dressed as outrageously as Papo once did.

We will never know for sure, but Papo's idea and the resulting tragedy may have been responsible for turning back the systemic persecution of metal fans and young people, sparing thousands who came of age in his wake.

I last saw Papo less than a year before his death. I travelled with a video camera and kept the lens trained on him while there was time. "Tell the world our story," he said. "It would be better accompanied by photos of frikis, so a magazine would be best." I still see his eyes, penetrating like bullets through the back of my mind: "Make sure it's metal." MH

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HIV/AIDS, OR IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS, CONTACT TERRENCE HIGGINS TRUST'S UK HELPLINE ON 0808 802 1221 OR WWW.THT.ORG.UK, OR FOR WORLDWIDE ASSISTANCE GO TO AVERT AT WWW.AVERT.ORG

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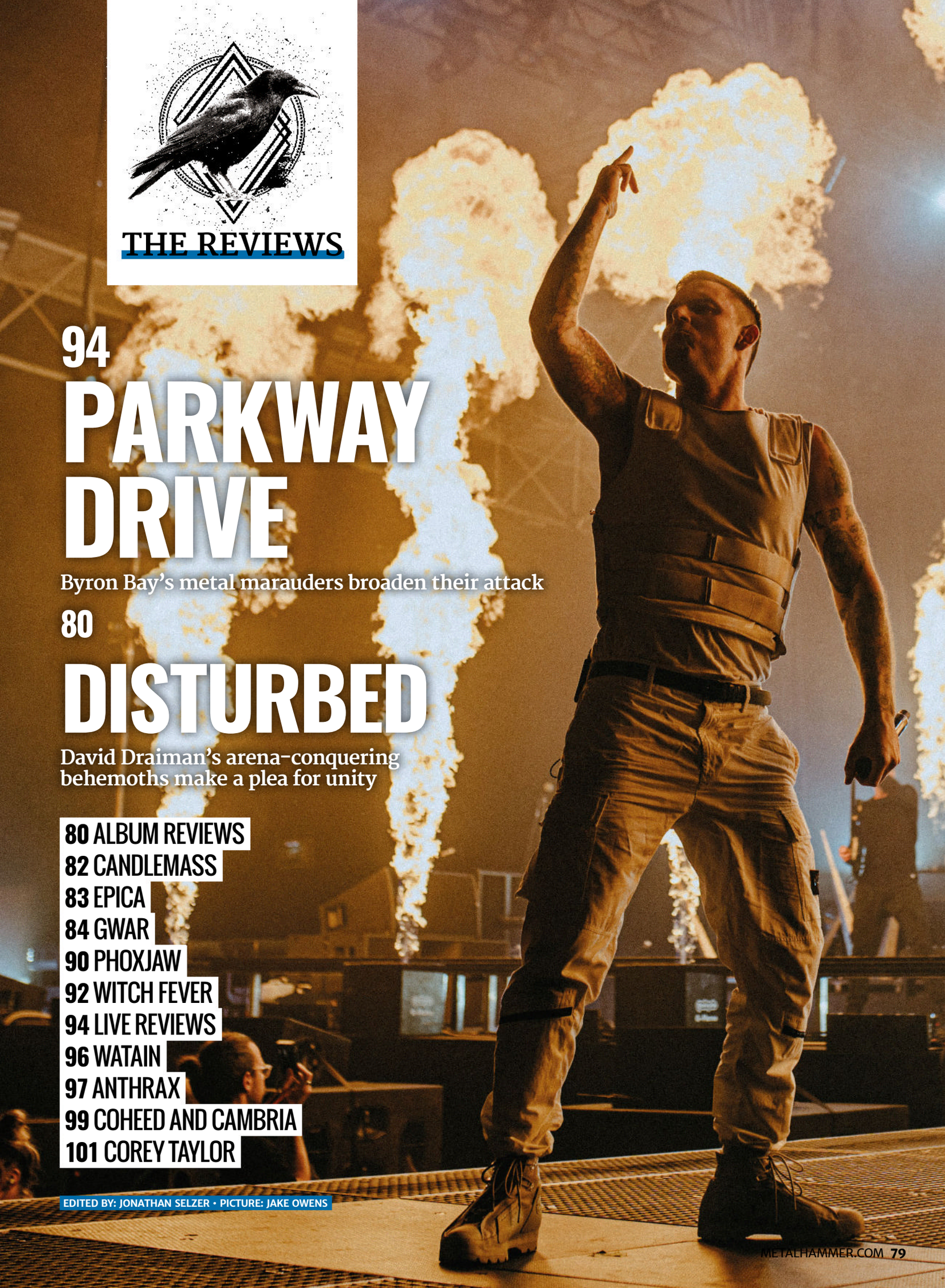


THE REVIEWS

94
PARKWAY DRIVE
Byron Bay's metal marauders broaden their attack

80
DISTURBED
David Draiman's arena-conquering behemoths make a plea for unity

80 ALBUM REVIEWS
82 CANDLEMASS
83 EPICA
84 GWAR
90 PHOXJAW
92 WITCH FEVER
94 LIVE REVIEWS
96 WATAIN
97 ANTHRAX
99 COHEED AND CAMBRIA
101 COREY TAYLOR

EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: JAKE OWENS

Disturbed take action against factions

DISTURBED

Divisive

REPRISE

David Draiman's arena-made metallers weigh in on the culture wars

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON to hear Disturbed referred to as a "polarising" band. It's not because of any particularly controversial aspects of their music; it's likely quite the opposite – that in their polished amalgam of mainstream metal, they've struck certain creative compromises that have paved the way to commercial dominance. And with a sound that has remained largely the same – a brawny synthesis of Pantera, Tool and 90s nu metal – there's an inescapable sense of playing it safe.

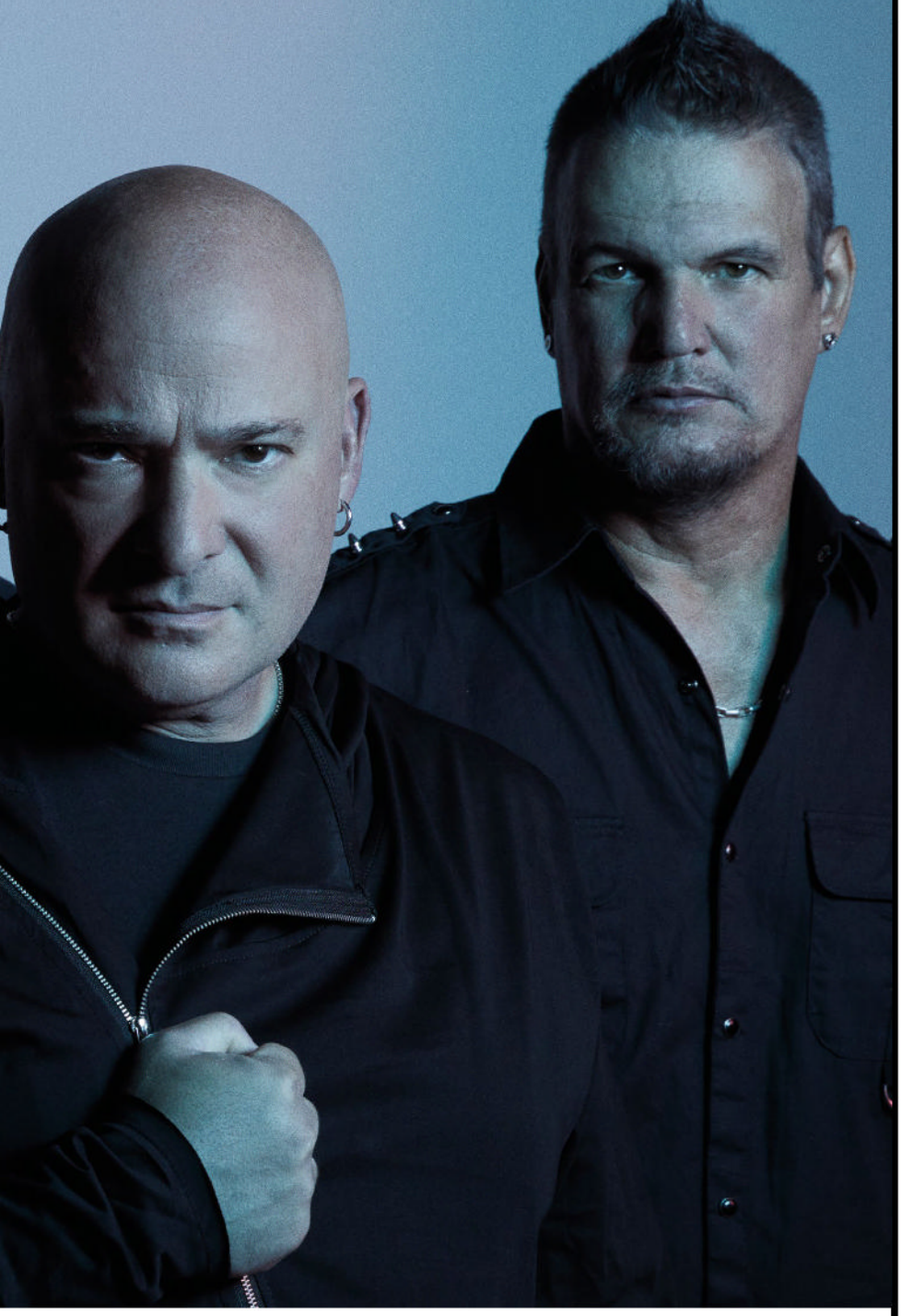
But while metal audiences tend to cast suspicion, if not outright derision, on mainstream success, it's inarguable that Disturbed are one of the most commercially successful metal acts of all time. Their streak of five albums debuting at No.1 on the Billboard 200 is a feat equalled only by Metallica and the Dave Matthews Band. It's therefore both fitting and ironic that they'd title their latest album *Divisive*.

Disturbed's eighth offering is a 10-track affair that frontman David Draiman has described as "about 90% heavy as fuck" and "10% of caring, loving goodness." Setting aside such wanton puffery, the latest outing from the Chicago metallers is wholly devoid of surprises. For the band's loyal supporters, this is very good news. Since the late 90s, Disturbed have mastered the ability of crafting muscular, radio-friendly anthems that have varied relatively little over the years. Long embracing the idea that what isn't broken isn't in need of repair, *Divisive* puts this principle into practice.

Straight off the bat, their trademark sound erupts throughout the first single, *Hey You* – a bouncy, industrial-powered banger with razorwire riffs and the percussive squall of bassist John Moyer and drummer Mike Wengren. David Draiman's rapid-fire, staccato delivery recalls the band's early nu metal origins, but the chorus swells with the anthemic grandeur of more recent efforts. *Unstoppable* is an unrelenting beatdown

UNSTOPPABLE BEGS TO APPEAR IN A _COBRA KAI_ TRAINING MONTAGE

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN



with a blasting riff and shout-out chorus that absolutely begs to appear in a *Cobra Kai* training montage. Along with *Love To Hate* and *Take Back Your Life*, the album's strongest moments invoke the polish and power that make modern metal so doggedly compelling.

The theme of *Divisive*, according to David, is both "partisan tribal warfare" and the corrosive effects of society growing "addicted to outrage." The ripping title track certainly speaks to these themes, as does *Bad Man*, a vintage slab of alt metal recalling their *Ten Thousand Fists* era, raining down sheets of heavily distorted power chords and Mike's thunderous rolling toms.

It's not all riffs and rainbows. *Don't Tell Me* – a paint-by-numbers power ballad featuring Heart's Ann Wilson – features some gorgeous fretwork from Dan Donegan, but overall it lacks the sort of memorable hook that you'd typically find in such songs. *Feeding The Fire* plays it safe with brooding, mid-tempo pacing and a saccharine chorus that you'll be hard-pressed to recall when the album finishes.

Anybody waiting for Disturbed to throw a curveball into the mix really hasn't been paying attention. The veteran metallers have always favoured refinement over revolution and their focus remains on writing, playing and producing a very specific style of polished but aggressive metal that sounds as good in a football stadium as it does from the beer-sodden floor of a tiny club. Polarising or not, Disturbed have reasserted their claim to the modern metal throne and *Divisive* will surely delight their existing fans, while picking up a few more along the way.

FOR FANS OF: **Five Finger Death Punch, Avenged Sevenfold, Stone Sour**

JOE DALY

96 BITTER BEINGS
Synergy Restored
NUCLEAR BLAST

CKY's former frontman keeps within his comfort zone

Founding CKY member Deron Miller has made no secret that 96 Bitter Beings is a continuation of the swaggering, *Jackass*-affiliated rock band he helped form in the late 90s. As such, this second album from them is exactly what you'd expect: 11 songs of perfectly functioning, riff-filled hard rock that will delight those who skateboard on a regular basis. There are a couple of standout tracks, namely opener *Vaudeville's Revenge* and *90 Car Pile Up*, while *Slither Away* delivers a nicely understated synth line. But ultimately, this is little more than a fine nostalgia trip.

FOR FANS OF: **CKY, Alien Ant Farm, Nonpoint**

ELLIOT LEAVER

ASTROSAUR
Portals
PELAGIC

Out-there heavy prog from the frozen North

A post-metal power trio from Oslo, Astrosaur gently prod the boundaries on their second full-length. *Portals* is wholly instrumental and built from surging, Mogwai-like crescendos, forceful waves of unison riffing and a sense of otherworldly vastness. Some of the band's ideas are powerful enough to flourish within a succinct, four-minute storm of sound; *Opening* and *Reptile Empire* get to the point quickly, and stay there. But it's lengthier pieces like *Black Hole Earth* that showcase Astrosaur's ambition. Evolving from crazed riff assault to feather-light, beatific detour and back again, it's overpowering in the best possible way. Even better, the closing *Eternal Return* is a 23-minute labyrinth of seamlessly blended atmospheres, artful dynamic shifts and, most importantly, massive riffs.

FOR FANS OF: **Cult Of Luna, Elder, Mogwai**

DOM LAWSON

AVOID
Cult Mentality
THRILLER

Seattle alt metallers shake up their bag of tricks

Nostalgia and genre-bending collide on Avoid's follow-up to their 2020 EP, *The Burner*, as the Seattle five-piece flit unashamedly between nu metal, metalcore and thoroughly danceable pop-rocking beats. *My World* and *Split (Kill It)* mix glitchy electronica and riff-addled blasts, while meta-banger *Whatever* pays cheeky homage (cue the 'Robot Voice' spoken intro) to yesteryear's crabcore acts amid a flurry of erratic rhythms and soaring vocal melodies. Measured chaos reigns elsewhere as vitriolic screams segue into sax-drenched noodling before *Midnight Six*'s industrial grooves and huge chorus conclude matters on an anthemic high. With *Cult Mentality*, Avoid have delivered a record written for the road, and with moshpits in mind.

FOR FANS OF: **Stray From The Path, Beartooth, Cane Hill**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

Candlemass fail to shine on their 13th album

CANDLEMASS
Sweet Evil Sun
NAPALM

Sweden's long-running doomlords hold a steady orbit

IT SAYS MUCH about the steadfastness of Candlemass bassist and bandleader Leif Edling's vision that the Stockholm doom kings have retained such a consistent approach across a number of different singers, just as Black Sabbath remained the vehicle for Tony Iommi's guitar, whichever vocalist he was employing. It wouldn't be too flippant to quip that Candlemass remain the vehicle for Iommi's guitar too. They are the Swedish Sabs at this point, the comparison echoed as much in their bullish persistence and continuity across a wayward, decades-long career as in the songs themselves, still devotedly steeped in the art of flatted fifth string-bending and sounds of rainfall and tolling bells.

After inventing and nailing epic doom metal with singer Johan Längquist on landmark 1986 debut *Epicus Doomicus Metallicus*, Candlemass shot to fame with mercurial monastic frontman Messiah Marcolin, whose departure precipitated the band's dissolution in 1994. After a couple more singers, Messiah was back for a self-titled 2005 comeback album, vanishing again for good a year later. Since then, barely a year has gone by without a Candlemass LP, EP, single or live record, despite working through a couple more frontmen before calling back the singer who was there at the get-go, Johan re-joining for 2019's *The Door To Doom*. His voice now possesses more gritty dynamics, perfectly attuned for the hulking riffs and classic rock-infused songwriting of *Sweet Evil Sun*, this 13th studio album calling for less otherworldly atmospherics and melodramatic melancholy, and more forceful projection and snarling energy.

Musically, of course, it's more down-to-earth doom for the diehards, but like much of their latter output, the songs have a tendency to plod in circles rather than aspiring to greatness. Individual riffs and solos shine, but ultimately, it's frustrating for such influential pioneers to sound so unexceptionally derivative.

FOR FANS OF: **Black Sabbath, Pentagram, Pallbearer**

CHRIS CHANTLER

BATTALIONS
King Of A Dead World
APF

Northern sludge aggressors get back into their groove

This Hull sludge quartet are going back to basics on their fourth album, homing in on the huge, infectious groove that made them such a force to be reckoned with. New drummer Simon Harrison has brought a ferocious energy to the band, dropping into swaggering grooves on songs like *Bones To Dust*. Phil Wilkinson's hoarse shriek sounds more abrasive than ever, contrasting nicely with the band's upbeat Southern bounce. That said, there's a bit more darkness creeping into their crowd-pleasing swing this time around, as punkier cuts like *Parasite* drip with genuine malice. The closing title track, meanwhile, is the sludgiest thing they've produced yet, eschewing those stoner rock licks in favour of stark, crushing misery.

FOR FANS OF: **Charger, Clutch, Scissorfight**

KEZ WHELAN

BLACK ANVIL
Regenesis
SEASON OF MIST

Sophisticated feralism from NYC's black metal veterans

While this melodic BM institution's fifth album features all the usual angry swarm-of-bees guitars, guttural blasphemies and tornado blasts of occult heat, *Regenesis* finds the band digging ever deeper into their bag of sepulchral tricks. Opener *The Gates Of Brass* features moments of Ghost-like grandeur, particularly in the choral backing vocals, which add a gothic ambiance to the proceedings. *Silver & Steele* is a pocket symphony of rain-slicked midnight gloom, and *Grant Us His Love* veers from visceral and raw musical violence to moments of ethereal, tragic beauty. Black Anvil still sound like prowling werewolves, they just sound like sophisticated ones here.

FOR FANS OF: **Watain, Dark Funeral, Judas Priest**

KEN McINTYRE

BLACK ROYAL
Earthbound
M-THEORY AUDIO

Finnish filthmongers refine their sludge/death attach

This Finnish quartet have a distinctive sound; think *Wolverine Blues*-era Entombed with a smidgen of Crowbar, doused in a melodeath sheen. Black Royal's third album is their most polished yet, with more of a hard rock influence creeping in on bombastic cuts like *Law Of Nature*. Their filthier side remains on *Ghosts Of The Dead* and the Sabbath-esque *Queen Of The Underworld*, but there's a heightened sense of melody and atmosphere. *Phoenix Ascending* lets optimistic chord progressions shine through, and *Bleed Your Soul* veers between rollicking Dismember-style chugging and bombastic, arena rock choruses with ease. *Earthbound* may not be Black Royal's heaviest album, but it is their most confident yet.

FOR FANS OF: **Entombed, Crowbar, Swallow The Sun**

KEZ WHELAN

CANDLEMASS: PRESS/LINDA AKERBERG

BLODKVALT
Algor Mortis
FYSISK FORMAT

Norwegian black metallers double down on the dirt

Blodkvalt's scuzzy, buzzing BM has become even more abrasive and lo-fi than last year's demo, summoning early Darkthrone vibes on ripping opener *The Abode Of The Dead* and even bubbling over into full-on harsh noise during *Controlled Death*. *Algor Mortis* has a brash punk energy coursing through its veins – not least during the d-beat-powered *Anthropophagous* and the floor-punching *Infernal Obliteration* – and vocalist Håkon Sakseide's wide-eyed, full-throated shrieks sound like *Deathcrush*-era Maniac wrestling a rabid animal, injecting an anxious, unhinged vitality into the band's punchy, jet-black blur. Crushing closer *41:10* and the thumping *Mutilated* may drop into a desolate, Hellhammer-style churn, but for the most part, *Algor Mortis* moves at a frantic pace; even *Mutilated* eventually erupts into a mucky cascade of blasts and chilling tremolo. This is one hell of a debut.

FOR FANS OF: Darkthrone, Hexis, Okkultokrati

KEZ WHELAN

BONECARVER
Carnage Funeral
UNIQUE LEADER

Spain's deathcore aggressors create a symphony of bloodshed

Having ditched their Cannibal Grandpa moniker and slam roots on 2021's *Evil*, this Spanish quartet have ventured into even giddier realms. Chucking on a bunch of orchestral instruments and choirs is at the forefront of the deathcore renaissance, but Bonecarver have managed to add the symphonic grandeur with a bit more sophistication. The crushing low-end of *Thorned* and *Pillars Of Tragedy*'s frenzied opening are augmented by a typical wall-of-sound approach alongside Fernando del Villar's monstrous vocal range. Yet there are plenty of little flourishes and arrangements that put the strings front and centre instead of being a mere afterthought. Of course, what matters above all is the iron-played core, with the band showing off a variety of savage riffs, melodic interplay, and furious breakdowns that, while not being particularly memorable, nevertheless leave sufficient bruising.

FOR FANS OF: Make Them Suffer, Shadow Of Intent, Winds Of Plague

ADAM BRENNAN

BONES
Vomit
DISORDER RECORDINGS

Usurper alumni dig ever deeper into death metal's crust

Chicago can lay claim to some of metal's finest bands, and with three ex- or current members of Usurper involved, Bones don't let you down. Modern metal can often be too clean and too polished. Not this trio. These riffs have so much dirt you could plant crops in them. With one eye on death metal's godfathers Master and Slaughter, and the other on 80s hardcore, *Vomit* doesn't stint on massive, crunching, filth-ridden unpleasantness. With production duties shared by heavyweights Steve Albini and Sanford Parker, the sound is as raw as road rash, but from the chainsaw assault of *Beware Of Ghouls* to a powerful cover of Van Halen's *She's The Woman*, Bones never lose their punch.

FOR FANS OF: Autopsy, Nails, Obituary

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

BORDERS
Bloom Season
ARISING EMPIRE

UK rap-metalcore mosh-starters join the heavyweight league

What's the anatomy of a banger? Turbocharged grooves? Whopping choruses? Breakdowns to loosen bowels to? On their second album, *Bloom Season*, Borders have got all the boxes ticked. Since emerging with their djenty metalcore EP, *Diagnosed*, in 2017, the Lincoln mosh callers have tweaked their sound, flirting with rap and deathcore on its follow-up, *Purify* – and this time around, everything's been given an adrenaline injection. *Fade To Black*, *Fix This* and the trap-inflected *NWWM*, which features fellow pit-starters Dropout Kings, all sound massive, thrusting the nu metal bounce, rap-rock and electronics upfront. *Suffer* dropkicks its way into view amongst techy *Holy Hell*-era Architects riffs with plenty of newfound swagger, but the highlight is the filthy Cane Hill collab, *Godless*, which drags the slightest modicum of hope down into a twisted deathcore basement and pummels it into submission.

FOR FANS OF: Hacktivist, Stray From The Path, Architects

DANNII LEIVERS

Epica crown their 20th anniversary celebrations with a plethora of guests

EPICA
The Alchemy Project
ATOMIC FIRE

Symphonic metal A-listers get on down with some unexpected guests

HAVING RECENTLY CELEBRATED their 20th anniversary with a hugely ambitious concert and stream, multiple album re-releases and theatrical premieres of early live shows, Epica still aren't done pulling out all the stops. Cue *The Alchemy Project* – a unique collaborative mini-album comprising seven tracks and a roster of special guests. It's a line-up that's as baffling as it is enticing; whoever thought they'd see prog veterans Uriah Heep credited on the same album as Fleshgod Apocalypse?

With such names attached, this was always going to be an eccentric record – and it is, but not necessarily to its detriment. Granted, there are times when the marriage of musical styles is a bit clunky and incongruous, particularly on *The Great Tribulation* and *Human Devastation*, where Simone Simons' buttery soprano is juxtaposed with death metal growls that feel shoehorned in. It's not as if harsh vocals are new to Epica, but the contrast with their music is so stark that they're better when used as punctuation, as on other tracks like the apocalyptic *The Final Lullaby*.

Elsewhere, however, their experiment is a success. The rousing *Wake The World*, a duet with Kamelot crooner Tommy Karevik, has the high drama of a rock opera, but one of the more exciting appearances is that of ex-Delain singer Charlotte Wessels and Myrkur's Amalie Bruun on *Sirens*. The singers portray 'sisters of the sea' who lure men to their deaths, which is just as dreamy as it sounds. The aforementioned *The Final Lullaby*, a surprising and brilliant duet with Norway's Shining (which means there's a sax solo – fuck yes), has the most stunning chorus, and best demonstrates the full potential of the album's collaborative concept. Overall, *The Alchemy Project* is hit-and-miss, but still worth delving into for these heavy hitters.

FOR FANS OF: Kamelot, Delain, Nightwish

CATHERINE MORRIS

EPICA: PRESS/TIM TRONOKE

Gwar: the spearhead for Generation 'Ech!'

GWAR
This Is Gwar
SHUDDER

Virginia's guardians of the gross spill their guts

"AS MUCH AS they'll say they're here to destroy the universe, they're actually here to save it," offers *Hatchet* franchise creator Adam Green on this documentary chronicling the blood- and cum-soaked history of shock rockers Gwar. And while initially the comments appear perhaps overly sentimental, once you get into the meat of the story, you'll end up agreeing with him, as there's plenty of heart and soul to be found in the near-two-hour movie after you strip away all the latex and (hopefully) fake spunk-soaked stage clothes.

Directed by Scott Barber, *This Is Gwar* is a story about loyalty, love, loss and artistic disillusionment. Featuring a feast of behind-the-scenes footage, as well as clips of their more infamous escapades – including the time they turned up to the Grammys in full Gwar garb – bandmembers past and present and famous fans, including 'Weird Al' Yankovic, share stories and insights from the band's scandalous 38-year history.

Much like their bassist Beefcake The Mighty, the rock doc doesn't pull any punches either, especially when it comes to the power struggle between Gwar's late, great frontman Dave 'Oderus Urungus' Brockie and artist Hunter 'Techno Destructo' Jackson. Mike 'Balsac The Jaws Of Death' Derks emerges as the star of the show when it's revealed he risked his life to stay with Pete 'Flattus Maximus' Lee when the latter was shot (everyone else ran away). The retelling of Brockie's *Terminator* phase, where he spent an entire tour speaking in Arnie's famous accent and clad head to hoof in leather, will make you love the legend even more.

An enthralling tale of a bunch of fiendishly talented misfits hellbent on snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, *This Is Gwar* is a must-watch.

FOR FANS OF: ***Anvil! The Story Of Anvil*, *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, *Metallica: Some Kind Of Monster***

EDWIN McFEE

CABAL
Magno Interitus
NUCLEAR BLAST

Danish death metal bruisers unleash multiple modes of attack

Cabal are intent on bending the boundaries of extreme music to their own will. This third album is a melting pot of different styles: 36 minutes of bludgeoning music that goes from the deathcore-infused title track to the industrial stomp of *Blod Af Mit* – created with the duo John Cxnnor – and continues on to the pounding death metal of *Exsanguination*. It's a lot to take in over a short space of time, but Cabal have given each song its own, clear identity, making *Magno Interitus* a captivating listen throughout.

FOR FANS OF: Thy Art Is Murder, Brand Of Sacrifice, Humanity's Last Breath

ELLIOT LEAVER

CHELSEA GRIN
Suffer In Hell
ONERPM

Utah's seasoned deathcore troupe leave very little aftertaste

Chelsea Grin are no strangers to playing it safe. *Suffer In Hell* is the first of a proposed two-part album, and while it offers technicality and rage, it does so with little style or substance. *Origin Of Sin* balances bulldozing guitars with carnivalesque synth and off-kilter drumming, but it's not particularly spirited, while *Crystal Casket* is mostly clichéd deathcore chugging and *'Blegh!'*s. There are some interesting touches to be found, like the all-too-brief The Black Dahlia Murder-inspired guitar licks that crop up throughout *Forever Bloom*, perhaps unsurprising as it features the late, great Trevor Strnad, as well as the atmospheric crush that *Flood Lungs* imparts. Ultimately, it's serviceable deathcore that does little to stand out from the crowd.

FOR FANS OF: Emmure, Attila, Suicide Silence

WILL MARSHALL

CONSTELLATIA
Magisterial Romance
SEASON OF MIST

Life-affirming post-black metal from the South African peaks

Formed from the ashes of South African black metal outfit Wildernessking, Constellatia offer harmonious surrender to life's chaos through the epic, emotive wash of the four lengthy tracks that comprise their second album. It's an ambitious step forward from 2019's rawer debut, *The Language Of Limbs*. While caustic elements remain, they do so within in a wider sonic palette, and now wrought in sharper definition. Founder/bassist/vocalist Keenan Oakes' harsh vocals on opener *Palace* journey through excoriating blasts to ambient, cosseting riffs and inspirational, progressive soloing. *Adorn*'s recontextualised blasts are positively uplifting, aided by guest vocals from Honeymoan's Alison Rachel. *Magisterial Romance*'s vibrant swathe is as bold as it is accomplished, and an aptly titled, rejuvenating sonic experience.

FOR FANS OF: Opeth, Alcest, Agalloch

TOM O'BOYLE

PRESS

CROOKED ROYALS
Quarter Life Daydream
3DOT RECORDINGS

New Zealand metalcore quintet fuse the lush and the lairy

This Auckland quintet dole out aggression, passion and catchiness in equal measure. Having initially bulldozed a path via two EPs, *Quarter Life Daydream* offers new levels of confidence and maturity, as well as some solid songwriting chops.
A tangle of rage and beauty, *Glass Hands* tears out of the gate amid a flurry of searing melodies and lead guitars. It's immediately addictive, while *Waypoint* and *Owed To You* are infused with memorable singalong choruses. They dial up the ferocious growls and bludgeoning riffs for *Ill Manor* and *Copacetic*, while the lush, prog-tinged fretwork and clean vocals of *Between You And I* round these eight tracks off in beautifully emotive fashion. Played with as much honesty as fury, this album will undoubtedly tick all the boxes for fans of modern metalcore.

FOR FANS OF: Northlane, Polaris, Monuments

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

DEFLESHED
Grind Over Matter
METAL BLADE

Deathly Swedes reanimate for their first album in 17 years

There are some comebacks you long for and some you didn't know you needed until they arrive. Swedish slashers Defleshed originally disbanded in 2005 after a decade of gore-slicked aggression. The world failed to tumble off its axis, but now they're back with a disinterment that demands your attention. Despite the moniker, Defleshed were never a full-on grindcore act. There are a couple of moments where they come close but, while *Grind Over Matter* is fast, raw and violent, it also boasts a chunkier, more measured heft. There are old-school vibes that fall somewhere between early Swedish death metal and Teutonic thrash, with some absolutely killer riffs, drilling rhythms and vocals that fall just the right side of feral. If, ironically, you are looking for an album with meat on its bones, Defleshed deliver.

FOR FANS OF: Hatesphere, Dismember, The Crown

PAUL TRAVERS

DESTRÖYER 666
Never Surrender
SEASON OF MIST

Unholy metal warriors refuse to mellow out

It begins with a snarl and ends in the grave. It seems safe to say that Deströyer 666 haven't changed much since 2016's *Wildfire*, and thank Satan for that. As with just about everything the misanthropic, Europe-based Aussies have released over their 28-year existence, *Never Surrender* is a raging, unrepentant heavy metal album to its very core. From the thuggish speed metal singalong of the opening title track onwards, K.K. Warslut and his henchmen deliver battering after bloody battering, with regular doses of eerie pomp to underline the infernal nature of things. Equally destructive on *Guillotine*'s feral street punk as they are on the windswept, black metal barbarism of *Pitch Black Night* and *Batavia's Graveyard*, Deströyer 666 hurl it all into Hell's cauldron, stir it with the severed limbs of their enemies, and then drink the fucker dry.

FOR FANS OF: Nifelheim, Sodom, Goatwhore

DOM LAWSON

DEVENIAL VERDICT
Ash Blind
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Finnish death metallers burrow into the Lovecraft-ian depths

Helskinki skin-flayers Devenial Verdict are known for punishing death metal, and that's in ample evidence here. *Ash Blind* opens with the ironically titled *Hope*. It's a festering wound of a song, a bleak, dissonant ripper that feels like a seven-minute death spasm. There are shades of terroristic psychedelia throughout, especially on the doomy, expansive *Pravum*, a breathless space-streaker grounded by a truly feral vocal performance from Riku Saressalo. The sun-drenched ambience of *Mourning Star* provides a brief respite from the onslaught, but it's gone in a puff and you're dragged right back into their aural hellfire. *Inanition* is pure sludge thuggery, a relentless mashing of fists and bone, and closer *World Breaker* injects a surprising amount of melodic guitar into what is otherwise another barbaric crusher. A gorgeously hideous album full of cosmic horror and creeping dread.

FOR FANS OF: Blut Aus Nord, Morbid Angel, Immolation

KEN McINTYRE

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

ÅRABROT
Heart EP
PELAGIC

A church organ. Shagging. Four eclectic tunes reimagined as Årabops. The Norwegian husband-wife duo give Coil's *Going Up* a gothic makeover, but their Nancy Sinatra cover is more Weezer's *Teal Album* than Johnny Cash's *Hurt*.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

BLACK MATH HORSEMAN
Black Math Horseman
PROFOUND LORE

BMH have reconvened after 13 years, only to find the world overpopulated with bands splicing genres and evoking the occult. Soaring and evocative as this EP is, only time will tell whether they're leading or following.

ALEX DELLER

DESPISED ICON
Deterre
NUCLEAR BLAST

A 20th anniversary treat from the kings of deathcore: five demos from 2004, newly remastered and, importantly, designed to smash your face in. In particular, *Bulletproof Scales* is deathcore at its most potent and pure.

DOM LAWSON

FLYING DISK
In The Heart Of The City
ARAKI

In the 90s a load of underrated, long-forgotten bands like Handsome and Man Will Surrender mixed massive metal riffs with alt rock and post-hardcore. They were great. Flying Disk are basically doing that. It still sounds great.

STEPHEN HILL

FORTÍÐ
Dómur Um Dauðan Hvern
LUPUS LOUNGE

Full of wind-whipping BM grooves, arena rock leads and hints of Americana, *Dómur...* suggests an alternate reality where Wayfarer and Sólstafir have banded together to protect the town of Deadwood from murderous black wizards.

JOE DALY

LAST IN LINE
A Day In The Life
EARMUSIC

Ex-Dio men Viv Campell and Vinny Appice and a capable ex-Lynch Mob singer showcase a creditably brave Beatles cover and a crafty, punchy new song, alongside two live tracks, one killer. An agreeable stopgap.

CHRIS CHANTLER

Imha Tarikat are primed to escape the underground

IMHA TARIKAT

Hearts Unchained - At War With A Passionless World

LUPUS LOUNGE

Imperious darkness from Germany's lauded black metal firebrands

THE GERMAN BLACK metal scene is in perennial rude health and produces large quantities of great music every year. Thus far, however, it has yet to produce a band to truly transcend the underground and strike through to a broader metal consciousness. Purveyors of a pitch-black and barbarous strain of extremity, Imha Tarikat have steadily evolved into Germany's most likely. The band's first two albums – 2019's *Kara Ihlas* and the following year's *Sternenberster* – detonated with irrefutable impact. Sonically superior and even more explosive than its predecessors, *Hearts Unchained – At War With A Passionless World* may prove to be too dark, too intense, for mainstream consumption, but Satan will surely find a way. Band mastermind Ruhsuz Cellât's formidably individual approach and razor-sharp songwriting demand it.

Superficially, Imha Tarikat adhere loosely to the brutal and austere German black metal template, but there is momentum and mystique driving the likes of *Radical Righteousness* and *Brute Majesty*. Coupled with Ruhsuz's incensed fairground barker vocals, that air of malevolent mystery lifts everything here to a higher plane of terror. At its best, *Hearts Unchained...* is almost overwhelming. *Touch Of Mercy* is a slow-burning assault on the senses that wields huge emotional clout. *Flood Of Love (The Beast Trigger)* is an epic maze of strange melody and furious melancholy. Most startling of all, *Streams Of Power – Canavar* is a sublime, four-to-the-floor post-punk anthem that makes perfect sense as a precursor to the wild and wicked miasma of *Stardust Wisdom (Manifest Of The Deity To The Unkeen)*: a solid contender for black metal song of the year. Even the horror flick organ drones of interlude *Birth Of Grandeur* feel strangely momentous and bereft of cliché.

Whatever curious source of infernal power Imha Tarikat are tapping into here, the end result is undeniable. This is black metal art of the highest quality.

FOR FANS OF: Spectral Wound, Bölzer, Gaerea

DOM LAWSON

DEVIL'S WITCHES

In All Her Forms

MAJESTIC MOUNTAIN

Hypnotic doom digressions from the Glaswegian opium dens

Mysterious and frankly somewhat odd, these Glaswegians, led by the splendidly named Witchdoctor General, veer between crushing doom and shimmering dream-like pop. *L'image* kicks off reminiscent of Electric Wizard. *Blood Of The Witch* could be a love song from a 1971 lost horror film, while *Hunting Dracul* and *Tide Of Jupiter* evoke The Black Heart Procession's downbeat heartbreak. Closer *Hymn For The Supervixen* vibes like Goatsnake on a Russ Meyers binge. *In All Her Forms* is a concept album spread over four vinyl sides – Maiden, Mistress, Mother and Matriarch. It's grandiose, but they pull it off, at times sounding both joyous and despairing, but always fascinating.

FOR FANS OF: Electric Wizard, Earth, Goatsnake

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

DISILLUSION

Ayam

PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Germany's progressive death metallers find new forms of heavy

These German veterans and Opeth have followed similar paths. Both are basically one man's life's work, and both quickly departed the extreme metal underground to forge their own, uniquely progressive path. But if Mikael Åkerfeldt and co came of age by sounding like a death metal band embracing classic progressive rock, it feels like the other way around with Disillusion. The overall sound – drum parts aside – isn't typically metal, but the record remains damn heavy on an emotional level. It's towards the end of the record, when the tone gets stripped down and intimate, in that special place in between twilight and dawn, that Disillusion truly take your breath away.

FOR FANS OF: Opeth, Devin Townsend, Pink Floyd

OLIVIER BADIN

DRUDKH

All Belong To The Night

SEASON OF MIST

Ukrainian masters of atmosphere are caught in the crossfire

Given that his country is being ripped to shreds, it's easy to identify with the rage aflame on Roman Saenko's latest release. Over 27 years, in numerous projects, the Ukrainian has garnered the controversial rep as a feverish nationalist firebrand, giving heat to romantic and mythic ideas of Slavic renaissance. But, musically, Drudkh has always been his most accessible project, and despite the unremitting vehemence of vocalist Thurios, these four epic tracks fashion a cauterising balm to a nation's obvious pain. Whirring, micro-eddying guitar melodies, monkish chants and breakneck percussive barrages serve as a proxy blackgaze salve to an anguished exorcism fortified with passion and pride.

FOR FANS OF: Forteresse, Kroda, Fuath

SPENCER GRADY

PRESS/ELIF AKGUEN

DYSGNOSTIC
Scar Echoes
TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Danish death metallers take up residence in the abyss

Dysgnostic have become a far more repugnant but remarkable beast since abandoning their previous Defilementory moniker. While the quartet are as accomplished as any technical death metal contemporary, it's their ability to wrap the flurry of notes with a perverse, choking atmosphere that makes this album such a worthwhile exercise. Whether it's spreading a thick, menacing fog on *Beneath Abyssal Plains* or summoning forth warped, ungodly terrors from it on *Oceans Of Grey*, *Scar Echoes* writhes with a menagerie of twisted forms ready to suck you down into their world. Following the space afforded to the exploratory dynamics of *Nothing's Embrace*, the record continues to flow further and faster into the abyss, culminating in *Eternal Recurrence*'s dissonant nightmare and the lurid riffs of *Darkest Muse*'s chilling coup de grâce.

FOR FANS OF: Ulcerate, Gorguts, Blood Incantation

ADAM BRENNAN

EMPIRE DROWNS
Nothing
UPRISING!

Danish doom-death that still needs a little warming up

It's been almost a decade since these Danes' first EP, but, with just four full songs in 29 minutes, their debut full-length still feels undercooked. That said, the band's sound has definitely progressed; while still firmly entrenched in the Peaceville school of death-doom, there's more of a goth rock flavour, with tracks like *Anesthesia* juggling soaring leads with genuinely morose moments. They shine when their melancholic riffing takes on a more dissonant tone, but lose momentum on the chuggier, more generic passages. There's definitely promise here, though, and if you can look past the occasionally overbearing keys and somewhat clumsy lyrics, there are some great riffs and convincingly grim soundscapes on *Nothing*. It just feels like more of a light snack than a full meal.

FOR FANS OF: Paradise Lost, Woods Of Ypres, My Dying Bride

KEZ WHELAN

FIRE FROM THE GODS
Soul Revolution
BETTER NOISE MUSIC

Austin's soulful rap rockers follow the scent of the arena

Fire From The Gods have been beavering away, perfecting their super-polished rap rock since 2007, and now it's starting to pay off. The Austin quintet have just spent the summer months playing arena-sized US venues supporting Five Finger Death Punch and Megadeth – a clear indication of where they see their future headed. With their third album, they're writing the kind of material that will see them right. *SOS*, *8 Billion Rats* and *Thousand Lifetimes* exemplify the meticulously crafted, reggae-infused anthemia that has become their bread and butter – a mixture of styles that now sounds fluid and unforced. Their most potent weapon, though, is vocalist AJ Channer, who can do it all, bouncing from rapping to soulful cleans, and ensuring these choruses stay in your head long after *Soul Revolution* has finished spinning.

FOR FANS OF: Borders, Void Of Vision, Counterparts

DANNII LEIVERS

FORLESEN
Black Terrain
I, VOIDHANGER

BM experimentalists gather for a ceremonial rite of passage

San Francisco's Forlesen proffer doom with pedigree, formed in 2016 from members of respected acts Kayo Dot, The Botanist and Lotus Thief. Second album *Black Terrain* offers four longform rituals, with two tracks nearing the 20-minute mark. Often funereally paced, their music is hard to classify, incorporating elements of black metal, doom, and dark ambience. The contrasting harsh male and tender female vocals of Ascalaphus and Bezaelith by turns disarm and destroy. *Strega* starts things slow and mournful in a manner that's ceremonially grandiose but intimately emotive, but with nasty turns. The title track glowers, its acrid ambience lulling you into a false sense of security before the belligerently blackened explosion of *Harrowed Earth* hits and the grounding resonance of closer *Saturnine* offers a salve. *Black Terrain*'s extended ceremonies are chock-full of killer solos, nasty riffs and emotional moments worth digging deep for.

FOR FANS OF: Bell Witch, Dream Unending, Worm

TOM O'BOYLE

Isafjørd prepare to give you the winter chills

ISAFJØRD
Hjartastjaki
SVART

Reykjavík super-duo give you something to really cry about

WRITTEN AT THE heart of winter, in a freezing house on a dilapidated piano, Isafjørd's debut is a bottle of bourbon away from a Nick Cave lyric. The Icelandic two-piece comprise Sólstafir's vocalist and guitarist, Aðalbjörn 'Addi' Tryggvason, alongside frontman of hard rockers Sign, Ragnar Zolberg.

On a postcard, it's stripped-down Sólstafir. There's no black metal or real pace to be found, but everything else remains: Ennio Morricone-ish Western vibes, passionate crescendos, vintage keys, gain-hungry guitar and Addi's untrained, anguished howls. That warm, liminal space between melancholy and euphoria.

Ragnar is a silken kimono, Addi is a nappy made of bearskin. Together, their voices traverse a stream of Icelandic pop hooks and post-rock wailing; the title track has them emoting in the way Gary Barlow thinks he's doing. Likewise, *Fjord Of Hope* bears the only English lyrics: *'Like a child seeking love, I let the shadow in. God, I've tried to keep it far away'* cutting like Tories to rich people's taxes. But then there are these moments of imperfection: slivers of time that just slip through the cracks, waiting to be heard. The adjusting of instruments on *Falin Skemmd*, the count-in and creaking through *Andvök*. It bestows the record a sense of place.

If there's one flaw, though, it's a reliance on formula. The quiet/loud dynamic serves the songs and pays off – curl up in *Kuldaró* and wait for the pull and release, plunging from dusty, delicately picked Spaghetti Western into a greasy, genuinely heavy twin-lead stomp. But the trick becomes worn, given most of *Hjartastjaki*'s eight tracks start small, begin to swell, then deflate.

Hjartastjaki isn't a musical revelation. It's a heart-on-sleeve, raw album that should probably soundtrack an art film about grief, or an anthropomorphised lamb, or both. A gorgeous slice of life, warts and all.

FOR FANS OF: Sigur Rós, Sólstafir, Godspeed You! Black Emperor

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

PRESS

Kampfar: still cutting new paths through the black metal landscape

KAMPFAR
Til Klovers Takt
INDIE RECORDINGS

Norwegian black metal OGs keep expanding their sights

IT WAS ALL but inevitable that 2022 would find Kampfar moving even further away from the traditional black metal onslaught that underpinned their earliest efforts. More recent releases – particularly 2019's *Ofidians Manifest* – have seen the band balancing old-school BM with more ambitious song structures and progressive fretwork. *Til Klovers Takt* extends that vision further, unveiling a committed shift into progressive and at times even psychedelic realms, while ever rooted in their blackened origins.

Deeply inspired by themes of nature, Kampfar's latest opens with a blistering nod to the early scene. *Lausdans Under Stjernene* begins with creeping keys and echo-drenched riffs before erupting into a full-bore, blackened bombardment. Across all six tracks, the core elements of hammering blastbeats, throbbing basslines and screaming downstroked riffage build to reliably gruelling climaxes. But the real surprises appear in moments of spiralling cosmic exploration, as on *Urkraft* and *Flammen Fra Nord*, where a sustained sensory assault suddenly gives way to a sludgy, post-psych breakdown of fuzzy guitars and a flutter of cymbals.

The album's shortest track, *Fandens Trall*, taps into blood-draining waves of aggression, using chanted gothic vocals to ratchet up a sense of terror that propels the track to its spectral culmination. It closes on a high point, with the icy grandeur of *Dødens Aperitiff* – an agonised, slow-building epic that will leave some desperately in need of a warm cup of cocoa and some alone time when it finally ends.

Til... is not a casual listen; it's a work of tremendous depth, with just enough unpredictability to hold listeners fast to the vaporous echo of the final note. Kampfar have reaffirmed their place among the precious few OGs of their scene who are still constantly evolving, innovating and creating music as mesmerising as it is brutal.

FOR FANS OF: Enslaved, Blut Aus Nord, Bathory

JOE DALY

GAUPA
Myriad
NUCLEAR BLAST

Desert/stoner vibes with added big time sensuality

There's no denying that Gaupa frontwoman Emma Näslund's expressive vocals bear more than a passing resemblance to Björk, but thanks to some arresting melodies, robust riffs and interesting musical detours, this Swedish five-piece continue to build a sound of their own. Their second album draws on stoner, doom and psych, and those in the thrall of Josh Homme's trailblazing *Desert Sessions* series will love this. Gloom-laden, blues-fuelled murder ballad *Moloken* is a big moment, as is the chilling folk song *Sömnen*, which wouldn't sound out of place on a Robert Eggers movie soundtrack. A confident and sometimes complex opus, Gaupa's brand of mongrel rock has plenty of bite.

FOR FANS OF: Queens Of The Stone Age, Alunah, The Sugarcubes

EDWIN McFEE

HOAXED
Two Shadows
RELAPSE

Spectral wonder from the other side of metal's looking glass

Hoaxed swoop confidently from their darkened belfry, peddling a curiously effective mix of gothic grandeur, heavy metal acumen and AOR melody. The album's haunted house intro gives way to serpentine melodies and windmill-worthy power-chords, setting out the band's stall so effectively that you'll know within 90 seconds whether you want to commit wholesale to the OTT headrush or run for the safety of a third-tier thrash record. The mix of swirling keys, soaring memories and relentless forward motion is exemplified by *Where Good Won't Go*, which somehow unites *For Whom The Bell Tolls* with Eurythmics' *Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)* – in a manner as fit for the rock club as it is for Eurovision.

FOR FANS OF: The Cult, Ghost, Type O Negative

ALEX DELLER

INDIGNU
Adeus
DUNK!/A THOUSAND ARMS MUSIC

Portuguese post-rockers gather riches from the long haul

The fifth full-length album from this Portuguese post-rock quartet features five tracks that reward patience and perseverance. At almost 15 minutes long, *Devolução Da Essência Do Ser* is the album's centrepiece, a masterclass in slow-build tension and subtle musical shifts that flow organically over clean guitar lines and burbling electronics. The duet between guitar and fiddle on final track *Sempre Que A Patrida Vier* wrings out more emotion than many of the vocalists in these pages could muster, and even the sub-three-minute piano and strings excursion of *Em Qualquer Entranha* feels like a vital piece of the whole. *Adeus* is a sumptuous record that will pay dividends for attentive listeners.

FOR FANS OF: Godspeed You! Black Emperor, Explosions In The Sky, Toundra

REMFRY DEDMAN

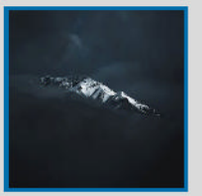
WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

ARALLU
Death Covenant
HAMMERHEART

Hailing from Israel's West Bank, Arallu endow their blaspheming black metal with Middle Eastern melodies. The results range from invigorating to the brilliantly yet hauntingly discordant.

MATT MILLS



JAMBINAI
Apparition
BELLA UNION

The sense they're still finding their voice serves the otherworldly atmosphere of Jambinai's four-track EP. An inspired meeting of post-rock and traditional South Korean instrumentation.

TOM O'BOYLE

KRUSHHAMMER
Blood, Violence & Blasphemy
HELLDPROD

A scintillating half-hour of profoundly filthy blackened thrash, these Brazilians' debut is an unholy riot. It's also full of genuinely great songs: *Apocalyptic Cult*, *Born To Blasphemy*... Everything about this rules. Hail Satan.

DOM LAWSON

PRESS

INGESTED
Ashes Lie Still
METAL BLADE

Mancunian brutalists slim down, beef up and hit hard

There's a definite sense of celebration as the UK's most prolific and consistent modern DM exponents release their latest album on such a prestigious label. Everything sounds bigger and more polished, with the scale hinted at on 2020's *Where Only Gods May Tread* now fully realised. Yet even though the opening title track includes haunting melodic vocals, don't think for one second that the Mancunians will leave anything less than a visceral scar in their wake. Each member of the now slimmed-down trio delivers a personal best, with Sean Hynes' expanded palette of riffs bridging the gap between guttural slam body punches and the more delicate building of atmospherics. And it doesn't hurt to have Aborted's Sven de Caluwé and the ubiquitous Matt Heafy lending their seals of approvals on the ceremonial *From Hollow Words* and *All I've Lost*'s epic ascent respectively.

FOR FANS OF: Decapitated, Aborted, Hate Eternal

ADAM BRENNAN

INTECHNICOLOUR
Midnight Heavyweight
SMALL POND

Altered stoner states from the UK's south coast

Brighton's InTechnicolour paint a very different vision of stoner. Opener *Bloodmoonshine* begins with fuzzy guitars but, as traces of Opeth and Porcupine Tree seep in, it adopts a different guise. *Tokyo Dream*'s stilted stumbling and crashing tones suggest a post-rock Pallbearer, while the guitars on *Fever Queen* bend and warp in a lightly experimental style. Elsewhere, *Corner Of Time In The World* shimmers like Mikael Åkerfeldt draped across a piano in a smoky blues club. Throughout the album, Tobie Anderson's vocal delivery is part shy indie frontman, part melodic crooner and occasional rabid bellower. But the collective vocal harmonies on *Eastman* set the scene best, resonating with stifling intensity amid crashing cymbals and fuzzy guitars for a brooding outro.

FOR FANS OF: Baroness, Kyuss, Stake

HOLLY WRIGHT

THE INTERBEING
Icon Of The Hopeless
PRIME COLLECTIVE

Danish metalcore conceptualists complete their three-album arc

Five years after *Among The Amorphous*, and more than a decade since *Edge Of The Obscure*, The Interbeing bring their three-album narrative arc set in a dystopian parallel universe to a close, absolutely brimming with the despair and rage of its maladaptive antihero. The Interbeing's MO is all groovy, Gojira-esque riffs chugging along over industrial synths and polyrhythms. *Icon Of The Hopeless* continues in that vein, with even more aggression – *Black Halo* opens with one long, guttural cry of sheer fury – that's nevertheless balanced with many soaring, melodic choruses, as on *Perplexion* and *Synthetic Bloodline*. *Icon...* isn't redefining the genre, but it's a cohesive and accomplished album with some great moments, like album closer *Eternal Eclipse*, which is like a final exhale as it gently recedes into an ambient outro.

FOR FANS OF: Gojira, Haken, Architects

CATHERINE MORRIS

KASSOGTHA
rEvolve
KLANG MACHINE

Swiss prog metal up-and-comers strike every essential beat

With Gojira decimating arenas and Meshuggah roaring at high society in the Royal Albert Hall, extreme prog metal's never been cooler than it is right now. This quintet must agree, since their second album is packed with everything needed for an avant-metal behemoth. For starters, it's heavy as fuck. *The Infinite* tumbles from lightspeed drumming to sledgehammer grooves and guitar taps, then wallops with a breakdown that makes most deathcore bands sound like squabbling children. There's also a penchant for melody overlooked by countless 'brutal' peers, like when *Before I Vanish* and *Plume* layer singing and growls on top of one another. You even get the mandated 10-minute finale from *Save Us*, which grows from silken post-rock to a screeching and stabbing heavy metal rampage. Kassogtha aren't necessarily moving prog metal forward here, but these wheels spinning still sounds good.

FOR FANS OF: Irist, Arch Enemy, Persefone

MATT MILLS

Supergroup L.S. Dunes refuse to get their wires crossed

L.S. DUNES
Past Lives
FANTASY RECORDINGS

Alt rock allstars prove to be the sum of their parts

IT READS LIKE the start of a music-related joke: what do you get if you cross Thursday, My Chemical Romance, Coheed And Cambria and Circa Survive? The answer is supergroup L.S. Dunes, whose formation just prior to the pandemic left fans of all four feeder bands salivating at the prospect of what could appear from their collective minds.

Debut *Past Lives* is the fruit of their labours and, given the talent involved, comes with high expectations. Second single *2022* is the album opener, a song that sways between modern punk and alt rock while Anthony Green seems on the verge of tears throughout. It's a bright opening that continues with *Antibodies*, Frank Iero's distinctive guitar tone coming through loud and clear. Songs like *It Takes Time* and the punchy lead single *Permanent Rebellion* hark back to the earlier days of emo, especially with Anthony's anguished tones in the former as he sings, *'Collect, collect, collect my anger, matter over mind, one day at a time'*.

Understandably, there are moments where the group's history comes to the foreground a bit too much. *Like Forever* is very much in line with Frank Iero's main project, specifically My Chemical Romance's formative years and the *I Brought You My Bullets...* debut album. Meanwhile, *Bombsquad* demonstrates the progressive expanse that guitarist Travis Stever is famed for in Coheed, condensed into just under four minutes.

However, while L.S. Dunes wear their influences on their sleeves, none of the songs sound like they were left over from recording sessions for the members' primary outfits; they all have an identity of their own, even if a couple aren't particularly strong. As a result, *Past Lives* is a solid debut that sparkles with potential, although it may fall a little below what some may have hoped for.

FOR FANS OF: Thrice, Finch, No Devotion

ELLIOT LEAVER

PRESS

Phoxjaw: lots of ideas, not a lot of focus

PHOXJAW
notverynicecream
HASSLE

Bristol's eclectic oddballs get too jacked up on japery

PHOXJAW'S SECOND FULL-LENGTH arrives at a time when their star is in the ascendant. Following positive reviews for their 2020 debut, *Royal Swan*, and triumphant appearances at Download and 2000trees, *notverynicecream* lands with a meaty *thwack!* and suggests a hungry, confident band taking their biggest swing yet.

And make no mistake, this is a big album: the songs, riffs, ideas and production are all huge, with the band clearly having a whale of a time as they joyfully mush together 90s alt rock and alterna-metal with gooey washes of 80s pop. Glutinous, dayglo and as sticky-sweet as its title would suggest, everything oozes together to make effective comparisons a fool's errand. Sample from one dribbling lump – the erratic, clumpy clatter of *Apples*, say – and you'll catch hints of Faith No More, The Armed or Will Haven, while another exploratory dipsticking will leave more divisive tastes like Incubus or The Kaiser Chiefs lingering on your tongue. That the band can combine different flavours so effectively is testament to their skill, as is their knack for sprinkling in and making sense of elements that would ordinarily make metalheads gag.

Funnily enough, it's the scattergun approach rather than the oddball additions that can take the edge off an otherwise exciting release. While an anarchic sense of playfulness is key to Phoxjaw's sound, this often manifests as unctuous, sing-song smartarsery that smacks less of Captain Beefheart-style surreality than a class show-off trying too hard to be funny. As it stands, the album's wild scope and sugar rush immediacy will likely propel Phoxjaw to greater things. For the sake of longevity, though, here's hoping they reel in the japes and chicanery, and stay serious for long enough to capitalise on the elements that fly the band's freak flag without descending into tiresome, stream-of-conscious goofiness.

FOR FANS OF: The Armed, Genghis Tron, System Of A Down

ALEX DELLER

KINGSMEN
Bones Don't Lie
SHARPTONE

US Melodic hardcore crew chase the nu metal revival bandwagon

On 2020 debut *Revenge. Forgiveness. Recovery*, Kingsmen balanced hardcore intensity with melodic heft. But riff-addled noise this is not. With Tanner Guimond channelling his inner Jonathan Davis during a thumping title track – all awash with clattering percussion and industrial beats – the band have taken a detour back to the heyday of late 90s nu metal. Sitting between early Disturbed and Breaking Benjamin, *Trial By Fire*'s skittering electronica and huge, clean-vocal-driven choruses place it firmly in chest-beating territory, while elsewhere there's plenty of eerie Zombie-esque theatrics with a glass guitar slide chucked in for suitably atmospheric measure.

FOR FANS OF: Rob Zombie Breaking Benjamin, Korn

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

MARC URSELLI'S STEPPENDOOM
SteppenDoom
MAGNETIC EYE

All hail the new doom/throat-singing alliance

The worlds of heavy metal and traditional throat singing have been colliding more and more, from avant garde experiments to folk metal acts like The Hu and Nine Treasures. With *SteppenDoom*, Grammy-winning audio engineer Marc Urselli is doing his part, and the results are startling. Members of High On Fire, Cult Of Luna, Ulver and Acid King lay down vast tracts of riff and drone, overseen and united by Marc's guiding hand. The runaway stars, however, are the indigenous artists – Tanya Tagaq, Alash Ensemble and Albert Kuvezin among them – whose mesmerising vocal performances outshine the more familiar Western elements and raise *SteppenDoom* to an exciting and entirely new plane.

FOR FANS OF Eagle Twin, Bloody Panda, Senyawa

ALEX DELLER

MMXX
Sacred Cargo
CANDLELIGHT

Star-studded gothic doom project proves a timely chronicle of dread

MMXX – a studio-only project with Daylight Dies' rhythm section and various European singers – is the brainchild of former The Foreshadowing guitar player Andrea Chiodetti. Besides perfectly encapsulating the pervasive melancholia engendered by these troubled times and showcasing a classy list of VIPs (Antimatter's Mick Moss, My Dying Bride's Aaron Stainthorpe, Dan Swanö etc.), it also proves to be quite comfortable with its status as an extremely well-crafted tribute to the gothic doom sound of the late 90s. That being said, a song like *The New Forgotten Ones* with Klone's Yann Ligner aims and succeeds at taking things to a more uplifting, atmospheric and even ethereal level.

FOR FANS OF: Katatonia, Novembre, Porcupine Tree

OLIVIER BADIN

PRESS

NOSTROMO
Bucephale
HUMMUS

Switzerland's cult metallic hardcore crew return to the fray

From the small but fertile Swiss metallic hardcore scene that sired Knut, Abraham, Shora and Impure Wilhelmina comes the return of small-h heroes Nostromo. With a history dating back to 1996 that includes festival appearances alongside Slayer, Motörhead, Converge and Mastodon, and studio time spent under the tutelage of Nasum's late Mieszko Talarczyk, Nostromo are no spring chickens, and *Bucephale* comes from a place that deftly balances maturity and ferocity. There's plenty of veteran grind, thrash and death being mixed and fired out at uppity tempos, but it's countered by post-hardcore melodies that dominate *In Praise Of Betrayal*. Meanwhile, *A Sun Rising West* summons the rapid-fire lock-step of early Fear Factory and tumultuous, angular thrash.

FOR FANS OF: Meshuggah, Napalm Death, Amenra

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

THE OFFERING
Seeing The Elephant
CENTURY MEDIA

US modern metallers reveal their progressive prowess

This is an intelligent, dramatic, and atmospheric album from a band with only an EP and one full-length to their name. The modern progressive metal quartet have now properly grown into their skin and flexed their songwriting skills. Think equal parts technical, experimental, poignant and unhinged with sharp production and observant and frequently political lyrics. *Flower Children* is brash and seductively cynical, *Tipless* is pained and poignant, and *Rose Fire* is a frenzied spew of energy that showcases the raw aggression and impressive variety of Alexander Richichi's vocals and Nishad George's fretwork. Each track may be wildly distinct, but The Offering ensure that it all sizzles, ebbs, and flows cohesively, closing it coolly out with *Esther Weeps*, featuring Cerce vocalist Becca Cadalzo.

FOR FANS OF: System Of A Down, Gojira, Eye Of The Enemy

NIK YOUNG

THE PRETTY RECKLESS
Other Worlds
CENTURY MEDIA

Taylor Momsen's rockers take an introspective, acoustic detour

Last year The Pretty Reckless released *Death By Rock And Roll*, an incendiary rock album driven by Taylor Momsen's gnarly vocals. Although it was inspired by grief, it was not, as some might have expected, an introspective record. *Other Worlds* – a collection of acoustic recordings, covers and reworkings – however, is. A standout moment is their cover of David Bowie's *Quicksand* featuring the incredible stirring piano work of Bowie pianist Mike Garson. Taylor Momsen's industry-leading vocals do the song proud, and also on Soundgarden cover *Halfway There*, featuring Soundgarden alumnus Matt Cameron. The acoustic versions of TPR's own material carries its own weight even without the power cables. *Death By Rock And Roll* is snarling while the country vibes of *Harley Darling* and remixed *Got So High* are stripped back and beguiling, resulting in a fresh take on acoustic rock.

FOR FANS OF: Halestorm, Soundgarden, Alter Bridge

HOLLY WRIGHT

PRYTI
Searching For Now Lost In Again
WELCOME TO PARIAHVILLE

Birmingham's melodic rocker seeks out new keys to sincerity

The second album from Birmingham-based Pryti sees the multi-instrumentalist moving further away from the grunge-laden gloom of *Tales Of A Melancholic*. But not unlike her debut, that huge, bleeding heart remains fixed on her sleeve. Equal amounts of hope and sorrow flow through the earnest veins of opener *Hypnotise*, its gleaming keys and soaring vocals tugging at the soul like a haunted plea. The cathartic *Wasteland* is akin to a purge, as Pryti waxes poetic on cutting out life's toxicity, whether it be bad habits, people or pattern of behaviour. Nestled among the stripped-back, piano-driven balladry and hair-raising orchestrations, electronic beats provide sporadic opportunities to bop along to. But even at its poppiest height, the introspective core on which *Searching For Now...* is built upon is never far beneath the sparkling veneer.

FOR FANS OF: Evanescence, Sarah McLachlan, Björk

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

Skin Failure: a thrash metal call to arms

SKIN FAILURE
Radillac
SMALL POND

Former Black Peaks members get out their Hi Tops

FOR THOSE WHO were enough in the know, Black Peaks were one of the best bands that Britain had produced in the last decade. For these people, the return of Peaks frontman Will Gardner and bassist Dave Larkin to the scene with Skin Failure, alongside members of Bristol noise rock band Memory Of Elephants, will definitely be enough to get excitement levels pumped way up for this debut before a note has even been heard.

A word of warning, though. If you were expecting a Black Peaks-style album of serious, progressive, conceptual metal, then you might want to temper your expectations somewhat. This is a far more straightforward and tongue-in-cheek project, with *Radillac* diving deep into the instantaneous thrills and excesses of pure thrash. Nothing wrong with that, of course, because when Skin Failure lock into the Motörhead groove of *Meat Pond / Down By The River*, they'll have your neck windmilling like a loon. Although Will spends most of his time here growling and grimacing like prime Tom Araya in a powerviolence band, when he does utilise the full range of his exceptional voice on *Southern Fried Homicide / The Radillac Battle Sequence*, he manages to channel both Randy Blythe and Rob Halford in the same song.

As you can tell from the songtitles and artwork, Skin Failure aren't being entirely serious here. But regardless of intent, the quality of the thrash they've managed to whip out on this debut is actually far greater than a lot of bands that are exhaustingly sincere about this type of music. Big, dumb, beer-swigging, headbanging music it may be, but Skin Failure sure know how to make it loads of fun.

FOR FANS OF: Power Trip, Municipal Waste, Havok

STEPHEN HILL

PRESS

Witch Fever have created a stirring call to arms

WITCH FEVER

Congregation

MUSIC FOR NATIONS / SONY

Manchester's punk/sludge insurrectionists take back the control

WHEN WITCH FEVER released their debut EP, *Reincarnate*, last year, it felt like less of an introduction, more a punch to the gut. The six incendiary songs on that release outlined the Manchester quartet's approach in no uncertain terms: confrontational, dirty, doom-laden punk, hellbent on wrestling autonomy from corrupt, patriarchal systems.

With the groundwork laid, their debut proper goes heavier and harder, with shades of Black Sabbath, *Bleach*-era Nirvana and the rangy squall of Show Me The Body churning in the mix. With the band calling God the *'ultimate patriarchal symbol'*, punishing album opener *Blessed Be Thy* focuses on vocalist Amy Walpole's experience growing up as a member of a controlling Charismatic Church she left aged 16, taking its name from a hymn she was forced to sing there every weekend. It's a sonic cleansing, a seething rejection of the oppressive attitudes that shaped her early life, and set to menacing guitars with Amy screaming: *'a slow decline, a cursed divine, you're dumb to think I would choose this'*.

The subject of abuse of male power rears its head throughout the album. On the title track, which grinds and drags itself towards a filth-encrusted climax, Amy bellows about the guilt of *'the whole congregation'*. On *Sour*, a venomous shot in the arm, she rallies against female oppression: *'We incite this violence, nothing ever changed in silence'*.

Of course, Witch Fever's mission isn't just to call out systemic corruption wherever they see it, but to celebrate the power that comes from surviving trauma. The band leave their heaviest moment until last with closer *12*, which builds, hurricane-like, into a chaotic emotional exorcism, an expulsion of fear, shame and repression that sees Amy screaming, *'He's dead and I'm alive / I can feel the weight of him behind my eyes/ I never got an apology'*. The message behind *Congregation* is remorselessly brutal, but Witch Fever's delivery is pure catharsis.

FOR FANS OF: **Bob Vylan, Show Me The Body, Bad Breeding**

DANNII LEIVERS

RIPPED TO SHREDS

劇變 *(Jubian)*

RELAPSE

San Jose death metallers unleash a furious minority report

While it's not unheard of for death metal to tackle socio-politico-enviro messaging – Obituary's *Don't Care* still hits as a climate change warning – the majority still gears its focus towards anti-religion, fantastical gore and horror flick worship. With album three, Ripped To Shreds' Andrew Lee venomously growl-spits on the topic of racism, Asian-American visibility, the "United States' indiscriminate bombing during the Korean War" and spurs debate on the topic of pan-Chinese versus Taiwanese identification. What isn't debatable is how *Jubian* rips a tangled web of death metal history around Andrew's perspective ire as the album emerges triumphantly with Floridian darkness and Swedish groove filtered by Bay Area thrash.

FOR FANS OF: **Carcass, Exhumed, Entombed**

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

SHOW ME THE BODY

Trouble The Water

LOMA VISTA RECORDINGS

Hardcore punks invoke the sights, sound and brawls of NYC

It is easy to see why this New York DIY hardcore punk trio's live sets are rumoured to be so special. Vocalist and banjoist Julian Cashwan Pratt sets the stage with the stripped-back *Loose Talk* before picking up the pace with *Food From Plate*. This release is meant to pay homage to the sounds, sites, and subcultures of their home-town, and the result is the sort of deliberately grimy, in-your-face style that a pent-up post-pandemic era needs. Pissed-off vocals, fuzzed-up bass, hip hop influences, and distortion all repel and pull together in a third full-length that's even more effectively hostile than the last.

FOR FANS OF: **Death Grips, Daughters, Chat Pile**

NIK YOUNG

SOEN

Atlantis

SILVER LINING MUSIC

Prog metal's most no-nonsense band take a downtrodden detour

Do you love Dream Theater's choruses but detest the aeons of wankery crammed between them? Then stick Soen on. Despite being formed by ex-Opeth and Death members, the five-piece employ the majesty of prog but leave the noodling at the door, resulting in some surprisingly accessible theatricality. This live album spotlights their songwriting prowess more brightly than anything before it, transforming Soen's triumphant metal into acoustic guitar- and orchestra-backed pathos. Joel Ekelöf's voice plucks heartstrings just as powerfully as the cellos and violins framing it, while the softened soundscape does nothing to hinder *Monarch*'s infectious singalong. That *Snuff* cover's just as gorgeous as Slipknot's original. Forget prog fans – this will reduce anybody who listens to it to a puddle.

FOR FANS OF: **Katatonia, Anathema, Opeth**

MATT MILLS

PRESS

SUGAR HORSE
Waterloo Teeth
SMALL POND RECORDINGS

Bristolian bruisers rope in some high-profile allies to their cause

Bristol's Sugar Horse have always vowed to do things differently and this new collaborative offering, featuring members of Idles, Heriot and The St. Pierre Snake Invasion, is no exception. *Disco Loadout* is a short, sharp burst of sludge-infested heaviness before vocalist Ashley Tubb gets to live out his Robert Smith fantasies on the woozy title track. Even those used to the band's sudden swings from very quiet to very loud won't foresee the song's murderous final third. *Gutted* manages to up the savagery quotient – a task that would be impossible without members of Conjurer and Pupil Slicer on hand to help. The result is continent-shattering. At four tracks and just shy of 20 minutes, *Waterloo Teeth* might be short, but don't think that means it doesn't warrant your attention.

FOR FANS OF: The Cure, Cave In, The Body

REMFRY DEDMAN

SXOKONDO
Altered Ego
DIVISION

Swiss metallic hardcore debutants set themselves a high bar

First things first: it's pronounced 'shock-hondo' and is the Esperanto word for 'shockwave.' It's an appropriate moniker, given that not only do the Swiss quintet embrace late 90s/early 00s metallic hardcore chaos, they dive headfirst into the wild world of DIY with their full-length debut. Coming off the back of two EPs, *Altered Ego* marries dissonance, morse code rhythms, palm-muted dynamics and mono-chromatic bellowing in its quest to be a successor to Botch's *We Are The Romans*, Converge's *Jane Doe* and Givethemrope. On one hand, Sxokondo succeed in bringing a violent, contentious noise, but beyond the guitarists' occasional divergent approach to riff construction, *Altered Ego* fails to deliver a definitive knockout punch to a subgenre struggling for unique new blood.

FOR FANS OF: Botch, Converge, Baptists

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

VÉVAKI
Fórnspeki
SEASON OF MIST

Heathen neofolk mystics find their equilibrium in a cave

Vévaki's heathen neofolk began with mainman Will Hunter's childhood fascination with mythology. He aims to contemporise inspiration from the *Poetic Edda* in a reawakening of natural connections and traditions lost. Although once a solo outing, traditional multi-instrumentalist Sigurboði Grétarsson is now a permanent member alongside vocalist Hrafnhildur Inga Guðjónsdóttir. Born from a jam inside an Icelandic cave, *Fórnspeki* brings ritual practice to the fore. Will and Hrafnhildur often sing in unison, and their complementary male and female energy, accompanied by dominant, entrancing percussion, makes for a transcendent experience. They're spirited and driven on *Heimdalagaldr*, and solemnly rousing on *Gestaþáttr*. Rooted in the past, the meditative state *Fórnspeki* offers grounds you in a turbulent present.

FOR FANS OF: Wardruna, Heilung, Byrdi

TOM O'BOYLE

WARKINGS
Morgana
NAPALM

European power metallers swap dragons for Pendragons

Teutonic power metal for the *Horrible Histories* generation, Warkings have done surprisingly well at stretching their martial cosplay antics across four albums in as many years. 2021's *Revolution* was still finding fun variations on a well-worn theme, the Teutonic power metal template traditionally not one of metal's most expansive. They have attempted to change things up a bit here by introducing guest vocalist Morgana Le Fay – and writing an album around her namesake's Arthurian adventures – but this doesn't much mitigate against the sense of over-familiarity, especially as she sounds more like Angela Gossow than a Celtic enchantress. Songs still reach for emotive highs, performances and arrangements remain meticulously nailed-in, and it keeps the head nodding for 40 minutes. But riffs and choruses get a bit too basic and mechanical here, the diminishing returns almost inevitable with this sort of work rate in this idiom.

FOR FANS OF: Sabaton, Powerwolf, GloryHammer

CHRIS CHANTLER

Xentrix: still a pillar of the UK thrash metal scene

XENTRIX
Seven Words
LISTENABLE

UK thrash veterans continue their resurgence

THE BIG FOUR of British thrash metal aren't held in quite the same regard as their US or even German counterparts. There's no Sabbat Day (although there arguably should be) and neither Onslaught nor Acid Reign can be accused of kickstarting a genre. Each had their own unique qualities, though, and spearheaded a scene that was more vital and vibrant than it might have first appeared. Xentrix were the most straight-down-the-line of that pack, playing a Bay Area-influenced take that made them one of the few UK thrash bands able to compete with their transatlantic peers on their own terms.

It all fell apart in the 90s, however, as they changed their style and line-up, and eventually broke up. There were a couple of stuttering restarts, but it wasn't until 2019's *Bury The Pain* that Xentrix firmly marked their return. That album was a direct return to the Preston band's roots – a lean and focused thrash-fest that slotted perfectly behind their first two, ignoring the misstep of 1992's *Kin*.

Seven Words continues in much the same vein. There are plenty of perfectly formed heads-down thrashers with the old influences shining through. The title track channels Testament's *The Haunting*, *The Alter Of Nothing* has a touch of 80s Metallica to the phrasings, and *Kill And Protect* even brings in a Slayer-esque squall. At this point, though, the band have moulded it all into their own compact style and, having set out their stall, they now sound confident enough to try a few new moves. *Everybody Loves You When You're Dead* and *Reckless With A Smile* slow the pace down and rely more on shifting rhythmic patterns and rumbling bass. It's a potentially interesting direction for the future, but in the here and now, *Seven Words* is a worthy addition to any thrash fan's collection.

FOR FANS OF: Testament, Kreator, Onslaught

PAUL TRAVERS

PRESS

LIVE REVIEWS

PARKWAY DRIVE

WHILE SHE SLEEPS / LORNA SHORE

ALEXANDRA PALACE, LONDON

Byron Bay's deathcore destroyers put the doubters to the torch

IT'S BEEN NEARLY three years since Parkway Drive announced their European run. The dates, venues and supports may have changed in that time, but the thirst for seeing one of the most consistently breathtaking live bands of modern times most certainly has not.

Unfortunately, Alexandra Palace's single queue for a single door policy hasn't sped up any over the intervening years, so there are plenty of people standing outside in the rain feeling frustrated that they're missing **LORNA SHORE**. The New Jersey deathcore crew are one of the hottest current bands in metal, and it's a shame their early stage time means they play to a crowd far smaller than the one they would get if it weren't for all the dawdling outside. Fair play to them, though – even with a man down tonight (bassist Michael Yager is filling in for drummer Austin Archey) their symphonic brutality sounds huge. Much has been said about vocalist Will Ramos, a charismatic fellow with a voice that can do guttural, piercing and, somehow, catchy all within seconds of each other. There's rarely much star quality in deathcore, but in Ramos Lorna Shore have a big dollop of it. Don't expect their upward trajectory to peak here.

Tonight is a dry run at playing this venue for **WHILE SHE SLEEPS**, who announce they will be coming back in September, 2023 to headline Ally Pally. It seems ambitious, but WSS have been on amazing form for some time now, and they've crept stealth-like into a position where dominating these kinds of stages has become second nature to them. Although longtime fans may grumble at the lack of early material from their set this evening, their latter-day material feels custom built to reach the very back of the biggest rooms. *The Guilty Party* inspires a mass singalong of the electronic hook that drives the song, *You Are We* sees a huge rush toward the front and, when all of Alexandra Palace fills in Oli Sykes' guest spot on *Silence Speaks*, it's so booming that you imagine the sound's ringing out all across London. So, While She Sleeps sound great, and they look the part too. Loz Taylor has become a truly magnetic focal point upfront, guitarists Mat Welsh and Sean Long brilliantly tag team riffs and vocals behind him, while Aaran McKenzie chucks his bass and himself around with no thought for his or anyone else's safety, and everyone present loves them. When they do come back to headline it should be an absolute tap-in.

There are no doubts whatsoever about **PARKWAY DRIVE**'s ability to obliterate rooms of this size. But there have been a few doubts from some online commentators that the broader style of their new material from latest album *Darker Still* may not be as exciting as the bangers from their past. They would do well to remember the reaction to songs like *Vice Grip* and *Prey* when they were first released: two songs that were divisive then and are now greeted by the heaving throng like absolute classics when they get aired this evening. Time will tell if the likes of opener *Glitch* or *Ground Zero* ever become true fan favourites, but on this evidence, it seems like a likely scenario. *Glitch* is prefaced with an entire crew of hooded druid types, holding flaming torches and entering before the band, who slowly march on behind them.

It's a far cry from the infectious fun of their early gigs; this darker, more mature and measured approach may have made Parkway a different live band, but certainly not a lesser one. When the song does blast into life, it's still a giddy thrill, frontman Winston McCall, decked out in a white stab vest, jumping, barking and corralling the crowd masterfully, and the band follow it up with a whole bunch of raging favourites. The aforementioned *Vice Grip, Prey* and *Carrion* all test the foundations of Ally Pally.

It's in the mid-section of the set where we start to see a new side of the Parkway Drive live experience, during a collection of their slower, more expansive songs, peaking with the new *Darker Still*. As in previous shows, a string quartet appears, but acoustic guitars also come out, and what can only be described as 'mood lighting' sees Winston silhouetted dramatically. If you've come to circle-pit to a bunch of breakdowns, then chances are you'll be a bit miffed at Parkway Drive leaving you behind, but the pacing and evolution of the set is expertly done. It suits the kinds of rooms the band now play, and it shows the breadth and grandiosity of their ambition. Plus, if you are just here for the heavy stuff, a closing trio of *Bottom Feeder, Crushed* and *Wild Eyes* show that Parkway are still more than happy to give people the (literal) fire, rage and riffs they have long been famous for. Brilliant, as ever, but this time a different kind of brilliant.

STEPHEN HILL

Lorna Shore venture into new deathcore territory

THE SET

PARKWAY DRIVE

Glitch
Prey
Carrion
Vice Grip
Dedicated
Ground Zero
Cemetery Bloom
The Void
Karma
The Greatest Fear
Shadow Boxing
Darker Still
Bottom Feeder

ENCORE

Crushed
Wild Eyes

Parkway Drive's new material undergoes a trial by fire

While She Sleeps: Loz's mic drop moment didn't go to plan

JAKE OWENS

Erik Danielsson: black metal's brightest spark

WATAIN/ ABBATH

TRIBULATION / BÖLZER

TROXY, LONDON

Uppsala's black metal standard bearers set the senses ablaze

Abbath is back in full warrior mode

NOBODY ENVIES BÖLZER. In opening tonight's four-band procession, the Swiss two-piece have to take the stage just 10 minutes after doors, which curses them with a modest congregation. At least their death metal-flecked nastiness wows those who've rocked up early, with the only thing louder than their cacophonous mix being the crack of jaws smacking the floor. Although their trve kvlt corpsepaint belies the sound of their bouncing goth metal anthems, **TRIBULATION** are no less enthralling. Opener *In Remembrance* has a chorus catchier than the bubonic plague, then *Funeral Pyre* swerves to Venom worship with its speed metal chords. All the while, Johannes Andersson's growls keep everything stitched together. If songwriter and onstage livewire Jonathan Hultén's exit left you worried about these Swedes' future, don't be: they're as majestically macabre as ever.

Chants of "ABBATH! ABBATH!" make the optimism for tonight's first co-headliner palpable. It's a new kind of mood that pre-empts the ex-Immortal leader's arrival: before his 2019 rehab, he was notoriously hit and miss, frequently too drunk to play. Tonight, though? The crab-walking pioneer is steering an unstoppable rampage. He powers through the grooves of both original material and covers from his previous I and Immortal lives with no time for banter in between, reaching an apex with the trilogy of *Warriors, Tyrants* and *Withstand The Fall Of Time*. The sheer heaviness gets heads bobbing en masse. The entire line-up looks the part with their monochromatic facepaint to boot, although naturally it's the frontman stealing all eyes, decked in iron-clad armour with his name emblazoned in front of the drum riser.

However, when it comes to visual splendour, nobody can compete with **WATAIN**. Singer Erik Danielsson arrives with a burning torch in hand, igniting candles, fire pits and tridents as his bandmates burst into the grandeur of *Ecstasies In Night Infinite*. The flames refuse to die down, so too the black metal pummelling: it's all roars, tremolo picking and lightspeed rhythms galore, largely lifted from this year's melodic yet thunderous *The Agony & Ecstasy Of Watain*. Erik's borderline pyromania is what stuns the most, though. Whenever he roars directly into one of the dozen blazes onstage or shoves his hand in them with the same level of concern your cat has for the fine china, it's spellbinding. At the end, the infernos even extinguish themselves with a flick of his finger. Mystical stuff.

MATT MILLS

HOLY FAWN

THE HYENA KILL

229, LONDON

Autumn has truly arrived. It's a chilly evening and the streets are lashed with rain, making it the perfect setting for Holy Fawn and their self-described "loud, heavy, pretty noises". Beforehand, it's down to **THE HYENA KILL** to warm the punters up. Thanks to the hour between doors and their set, plus Holy Fawn's adoring fanbase, there's already a sizable gathering for their spirited post-metal. Veering between barrelling alt rock and towering swells, their songs are stirring and majestic and fall on a static, but still loudly appreciative, crowd. Nothing compares to the reception **HOLY FAWN** receive, though. From the opening tremolo and thundering guitars of *Dark Stone*, they're nothing short of spellbinding. Weaving introspective lyrics around expansive, beautiful soundscapes, they make 45 minutes pass in the blink of an eye. Waves of sound cascade over the room, heads all moving in unison as the four members throw themselves and all they have into their final show of the tour. Through every crescendo or soft moment, Holy Fawn enthral every person in the room and their genial nature between songs only furthers the intimate, communal feel even in a sizeable venue.

WILL MARSHALL

HYPOCRISY

SEPTICFLESH / THE AGONIST / HORIZON IGNITED

ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON

Early doors and an early start mean **HORIZON IGNITED** suffer a sparse, unenergetic crowd. A shame, since their grooving, folk-tinged melodeath has all the right ingredients. **THE AGONIST** fare better, their progressive take on melodeath sounding massive while Vicky Psarakis's vocals flow between death metal growls and near-operatic melodies and everything in between, as a devoted core yell back every word. **SEPTICFLESH** have got just as many here to see them as Hypocrisy. As soon as they take the stage there are cheers and beers held aloft for the Athenian symphonic death metallers, and they tear through newer material like the majestic *The Hierophant* as well as fan-favourite cuts like *The Vampire From Nazareth*. The sheer level of energy throughout and the consistency of their back catalogue only further underscores their prowess and status. **HYPOCRISY** pull out every trick in the book – duelling guitars, fist-pumping chants of "Hey!" – with the look of a band that are having a great time playing to their long-running fans. If that's not proof of a band that deserves their stature, then what is?

WILL MARSHALL

TINA KORHONEN

Anthrax: Joey and Scott go fortieth and conquer

KATJA OGRIN

Municipal Waste: still raising beers and the zombie apocalypse

ANTHRAX

MUNICIPAL WASTE

O2 ACADEMY, BIRMINGHAM

NY's thrash legends celebrate 40 years of fun-loving riff mania

THE LAST TIME Anthrax toured the UK, they were celebrating the 30th anniversary of *Among The Living*. Five years later, they're celebrating 40 years as a band with a sell-out show in a venue twice its size. Hardly surprising; they are one of the Big 4, after all.

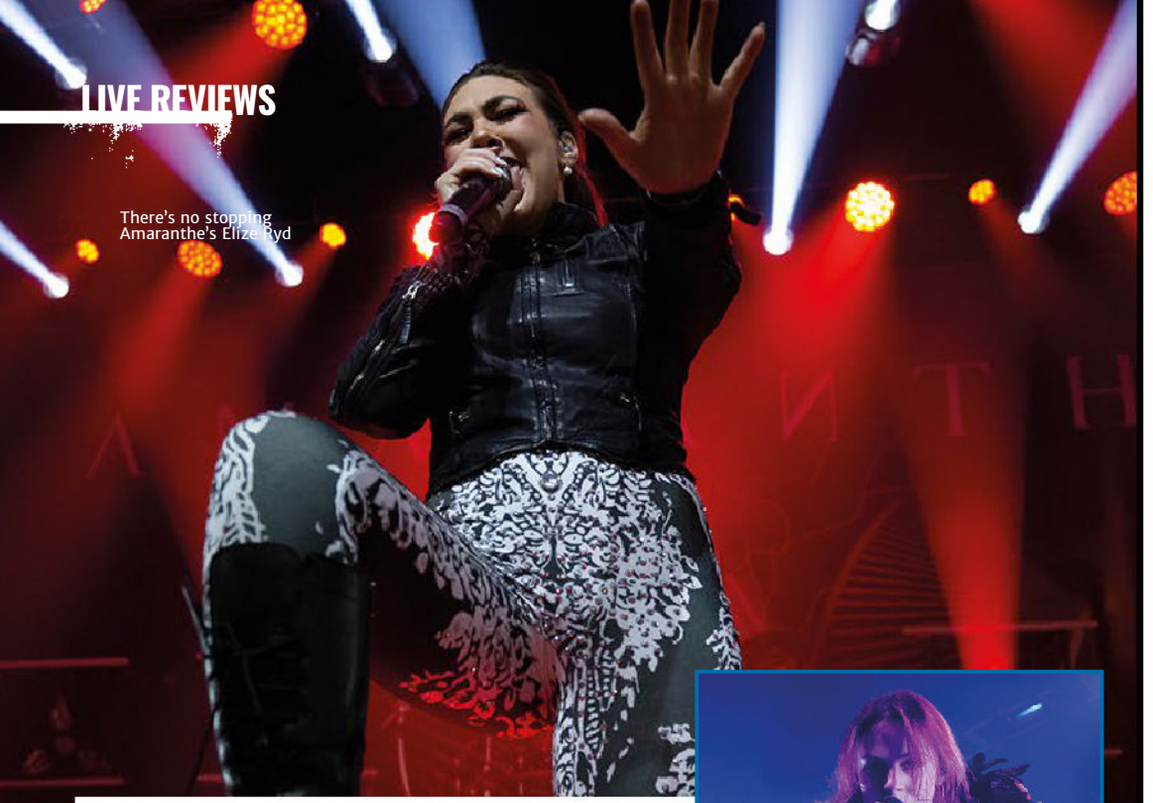
Tonight is all about celebrating thrash in all its super-speed goofball glory, and **MUNICIPAL WASTE** fit the bill like a glove, offering up a non-stop high-speed battering delivered with the zeal of a starving cat devouring a cream cake. It's a sweaty, frenzied mess, but god, if it isn't wonderful to behold, stompy little numbers like *Demoralizer, Headbanger Face Rip* and *You're Cut Off* blasted through to a roiling meat-wall of fervent admirers.

ANTHRAX might not have scaled the same peaks as their peers in Metallica (who has?), but a star-studded video intro sees Keanu Reeves and Lady Gaga join the likes of Rob Trujillo, Henry Rollins, Gene Simmons and Corey Taylor in paying tribute to New York's finest thrashers. An incessant rumble of thunder builds until the band appear in a crescendo of light and sound; the opening notes of *Among The Living* are struck, and the place goes fucking nuts.

The dancefloor becomes a writhing carpet of sweaty, shrieking thrashers. Not to be outdone, vocalist Joey Belladonna skitters across the stage like an overgrown crab on a hotplate, glee etched on his face as he barks out anthem after anthem. And boy oh boy, do Anthrax have anthems. *Caught In A Mosh, Madhouse, Metal Thrashing Mad, Keep It In The Family, Antisocial* and *I Am The Law* all follow in quick succession, an obscene show of strength and talent that leaves no question of how Anthrax scaled the upper echelons of thrash. Amid the triumphs come tributes to the lost. "Fuck a moment of silence, let's have a moment of *rage*," declares Scott Ian for Cliff Burton – 36 years gone that night – while *In The End* is dedicated to Ronnie James Dio.

The 13-song set passes all too quickly, even the inclusion of John Bush-era anthem *Only* and rap metal classic *Bring The Noise* scarcely scratching the surface of their metal-thrashing magic. Even so, it proves Anthrax are the fun-loving titans metal needs, a sea of sore necks and throats worthy sacrifices to honour the thrash metal legends. Efilnikufesin indeed.

RICH HOBSON



There's no stopping Amaranthe's Elize Ryd

BEYOND THE BLACK / AMARANTHE

THE FORUM, LONDON

Symphonic titans team up and go for broke

Beyond The Black leave the crowd raving

WITHIN THE DARKLY opulent trappings of London's Forum, a metal spectacle is unfolding – a warming antidote to this autumnal eve. Tonight's show is a dual header between German symphonic metallers Beyond The Black and Sweden's finest purveyors of synth-pop-infused melodic metal, Amaranthe. Bring on the drama.

The first thing that's apparent about **BEYOND THE BLACK** as they launch into the anguished *Is There Anybody Out There?*, is that singer Jennifer Haben loves theatricality. Between blink-and-you-miss-it outfit changes, the powerhouse vocalist adds a visual element to the show with a slew of props, from masks and horned headpieces to strobing fluorescent tubes that she wields like a wizard's staff. It might seem like they're overcompensating, but songs like *Human* and the folk-metal-tinged *Reincarnation* are so compelling that they really don't need all the frills. It's a clever, high-octane set of their most rousing tracks, but their greatest strength as a live act is by far their ability to sweep a crowd off their feet, as they demonstrate during the never-before-played new track, *Dancing In The Dark*. The lack of reliance on a keyboard/synth player onstage gives them a warmer, more organic sound that's sometimes missing in this genre and makes for a simply brilliant melodic metal show, that leaves everyone utterly charmed.

Continuing in the same high-energy vein are **AMARANTHE**, who take an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink approach to their music. Maximalism isn't just the name of an album, it's their entire philosophy. While they've undeniably got some irresistibly catchy songs, like *Hunger*, under their belt, it often feels like Amaranthe aren't quite sure what sort of act they are. Crowding the front of the stage is the current rag-tag trio of vocalists – Elize Ryd on sound-barrier-piercing whistle-tone, Nils Molin on Fabio Lione-esque wails and unbuttoned shirts, and former Sonic Syndicate vocalist Richard Sjunnesson on growls. They tear through the setlist with choreographed precision, all smiles, and the uber-glossiness of it all creates a disconnect that makes the band seem like the Abba Voyage holograms. Paired with their heavy use of backing tracks and little interaction with the fans, tonight they're rather cold, and ultimately overshadowed by their co-headliners.

CATHERINE MORRIS

ALEXISONFIRE

BOSTON MANOR

THE GREAT HALL, CARDIFF

Proving that Alexisonfire have one of the most devoted fanbases in post-hardcore, patient Cardiffians fans have been lining up outside the venue all day, filling every inch of the Great Hall in a matter of minutes. Openers **BOSTON MANOR**'s undeniable pop-punk swagger limbers up the crowd, their catchy brand of infectious riffs and big melodic choruses prepping us for the main event. **ALEXISONFIRE** explode on to the stage with a momentum that does not let up. After 13 years of waiting to see new music live, fans are treated to a healthy dollop from the band's latest album, *Otherness*. Their change of pace from frantic 00s punk to dirtier alt grooves seems to fit in well with the rest of their back catalogue, but when older anthems like *Young Cardinals* and *Crisis* slide into the set, adrenaline levels soar and bodies fly over the barrier ceaselessly. The five-piece pour every single drop of blood, sweat and tears into tonight's show, though it's frontman George Pettit's emotive and kinetic performance that truly cements their connection with the crowd, leaving fans breathless, never wanting to let go of this moment.

HYWEL DAVIES

VUKOVI

ZAND

ISLINGTON ACADEMY, LONDON

Tonight's sold-out show is a celebration of just how good the UK's alternative scene is. Non-binary, "ugly pop" artist **ZAND** opens, emerging brandishing a baseball bat and flanked by a masked dancer; they blend trap beats with distorted guitar and heavy electronics to unnerving effect. They're a striking sight and the crowd are certainly appreciative of their empowering, combative screeds. Fast-rising Scottish pop rock duo **VUKOVI** just launched third album *Nula*, and they get a raucous welcome from the cheering, heaving room as the lights flash overhead. Opener *Lasso* is incendiary. Pits start moving from the moment it kicks in, with the chorus prompting mass singalongs. That energy doesn't abate either; *C.I.A.U.D.I.A* has the crowd amped up as Janine Shilstone welcomes them to the "rock show", beaming from ear to ear. She's the epitome of the modern rock star; warm and commanding, with seemingly limitless charisma. Even their slower songs are anthemic, but it's the full-bore energy like in the gigantic *Quench* that threatens to take the roof off, with skyscraper choruses and constant crowdsurfers. If there was ever any doubt about Vukovi's readiness for big stages, consider it well and truly annihilated.

WILL MARSHALL

MARIE KORNER

Coheed And Cambria keep the crowd in thrall of the sprawl

COHEED AND CAMBRIA / THRICE

TOUCHÉ AMORÉ

O2 ACADEMY, BRISTOL

Prog metal and post-hardcore A-listers experience mixed fortunes

WITH CO-HEADLINING TOURS comes a possibility that audiences will favour one bill-topper over the other, but rarely does the pendulum swing so far as here. Bristol isn't alone in this regard, either; it seems the entire UK run is about the prog metallers from New York rather than the post-hardcore foursome from California. The knock-on effect is that opening act **TOUCHÉ AMORÉ** are seen as a bit of an afterthought, which is a huge disservice for a band revered globally among many circles. It takes them a bit of time to warm up – ditto the sparse crowd in front of them – but *Feign* and *Reminders* finally see them pull through as the venue fills and more voices sing back at them.

When **THRICE**'s opening one-two of *The Color Of The Sky* and *Scavengers* sees a now-healthy crowd largely unmoved, the omens aren't promising. But then *The Artist In The Ambulance* gets a massive response and, suddenly, the supposedly heavily biased throng is won over as large sections of the crowd sing as loud as they can. *Black Honey* keeps the momentum up and, by the time *The Red Death* follows *Where Idols Once Stood* in a mini revisit of 2002's *The Illusion Of Safety*, the place is finally rocking and remains that way until *The Earth Will Shake* brings an excellent set to its conclusion.

However, for all that Thrice have achieved, the cheers that welcome **COHEED AND CAMBRIA** say it all. A set largely dedicated to the most recent *Vaxis I* and *Vaxis II* records, the band's energy is returned with interest by a now-rabid audience who respond to every deliriously sprawling riff and bellow every fantastical lyric for the hour they're onstage. Highlights are many, including *A Disappearing Act*, as Claudio Sanchez moves from guitar to keyboard to deliver the luscious synths the track requires; *In Keeping Secrets Of Silent Earth: 3*'s singalongs rivalling a certain *Fear Of The Dark*; a rampant *The Liars Club* getting pits going; and *Welcome Home* being, as is now customary, nothing less than a joyous experience. A slight overrun in set changes and an early curfew mean the encore is curtailed, to the chagrin of those present, but it can't – nay, *won't* – spoil what has been a triumphant return to these shores.

ELLIOT LEAVER

Thrice: the underdogs rise to the challenge

Touché Amoré: extreme arachnophobics

JANSON BULPIN

Lingua Ignota: amazing grace under pressure

LINGUA IGNOTA

EARTH, LONDON

The artist extraordinaire seeks out the divine in distress

AS LINGUA IGNOTA, Kristin Hayter has long outgrown the in-the-round floor shows that first brought her face-to-face with often-hyperventilating audiences. The indoor amphitheatre of Hackney's EartH, however, is an equally apt setting for what feels like a petition – an appeal for justice, revenge, absolution – to forces both beyond and all around her.

This is the second of two quickly sold-out nights, and from the moment the lights dim and she walks onstage, the reverent hush is mitigated somewhat by audience members taking out their phones to record her, as if they're misjudging the unique, desolate intimacy of the occasion. And yet as much as a Lingua Ignota show can seem like witnessing a personal trial, there's an otherworldliness to it too that takes it far beyond voyeurism, beyond even her experiences of domestic abuse that are addressed so extensively, and into psychic realms churning at the edges of consciousness – a confronting of our own darkest fears that becomes a rapt, shared act of acknowledgement.

With no band (aside from a grand piano onstage, all the music is on a backing tape) there's a necessary element of theatre to the performance, particularly if your idea of theatre is Samuel Beckett's *Not I*. Hers is an internal dialogue dramatised to stark yet intensely immersive effect. Whether switching guises from wracked abandon on *Do You Doubt Me Traitor* as she repeats that shattering line, *'I don't eat, I don't sleep'*, to moments of imperious grace, or sitting on the front of the stage and amid the audience, it can feel like the choreography is all that's holding her together.

Lingua Ignota doesn't just offer personal testimony. Like Diamanda Galás, she's become something emblematic. Her vaulting, classically trained live vocals are often accompanied by a pre-recorded chorus of different registers, as though she's become a host for other once-silenced voices. And with a set focusing on last year's stripped-back, folk horror-infused *Sinner Get Ready* album, themes of devotion (religious and otherwise), divine sufferance and the sense of unnerving destiny lurking at the fringes come to the fore throughout the spindly tremors of *Many Hands* and the rural rites of *Man Is Like A Spring Flower*. The covers of traditional elegy *Wayfaring Stranger* and Dolly Parton's *Jolene* are elevated into heartstopping implorations that strip all your bearings from under you, but like all of Lingua Ignota's music, they light potent beacons among the lands of the lost.

JONATHAN SELZER

ANVIL
LIVING DEAD STARS
O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON, LONDON

It looks like every member of **LIVING DEAD STARS** has quantum leapt here from a different decade. Their bassist is a vibrant glam rocker, their guitarist has got the attire and seven-string of a djent musician, and their short-haired vocalist resembles a punk rocker. But you can't argue with their live skills, as the gaps between their dramatic tunes are plugged by hilarious banter. **ANVIL** have to throw all their shit at the wall from the off to stop themselves from getting upstaged. Toronto's proto-thrash trio immediately tear into *Metal On Metal*'s instrumental ripper *March Of The Crabs*, with frontman Steve 'Lips' Kudlow enjoying just seconds onstage before running into his audience and banging out riffs in the heart of the pit. "We play heavy fucking metal!" he declares directly into his hollow-bodied guitar, letting the amps reverberate the call throughout the venue to rapturous cheers. The remainder of the night's far from dynamic – three-minute anthem, three-minute anthem, three-minute anthem, rinse and repeat – but variation comes from Lips' anecdotes, as well as his party piece of playing *Mothra*'s solo with a sex toy. It's dumb, it's crass and it's loud – so, everything you need to make a great old-school metal show, basically.

MATT MILLS

UNIDA
HIPPIE DEATH CULT
THE LEXINGTON, LONDON

Portland rockers **HIPPIE DEATH CULT**'s low-slung, doomy rock may take a while to seep in, but there is a pleasing darkness to their sound – somewhere between the biker stomp of early The Obsessed and the 70s metal of Sanhedrin. Perhaps best known as one of John Garcia's strongest post-Kyuss projects, **UNIDA** are touring without the desert rock legend at the helm. Perhaps unfairly, some are dubious about the wisdom of this. However, stepping into those shoes is Mark Sunshine from Riotgod, and boy does he have some pipes. Slightly more raspy than John, he imbues some serious 70s vibes, hinting at the bluesy soul of Free and Cactus, which complements Arthur Seay's huge riffing nicely. It should be said, though, that their secret weapon is new bassist Collyn McCoy. A master of the rolling low end, he provides an unstoppable juggernaut of sub-soaked bass warmth that feels like a massive Sabbathy hug. From the opening groove of *Wet Pussycat*, it's clear that even without their famed frontman Unida can deliver the goods. The proof is the way every head in the room nods in unison to the insistent *Red*.

ALASTAIR RIDDELL

DEREK BREMNER

Corey has found a suitably ostentatious setting

WILL IRELAND

COREY TAYLOR

THE LONDON PALLADIUM, LONDON

Slipknot's indefatigable frontman goes large in London

TWO AND A half hours before Slipknot frontman Corey Taylor takes to the stage for his third ever solo show in London, a few hundred revellers crowd the streets outside London's Palladium theatre, gawping at the larger-than-life visage of the man himself leering down at them. It's difficult to imagine Slipknot playing a venue as exuberantly grandiose as this one, and yet, judging by the number of people wearing their t-shirts this evening, it is Slipknot that has brought Taylor here. Toto, we have a feeling we're not huffing dead crows in jars anymore.

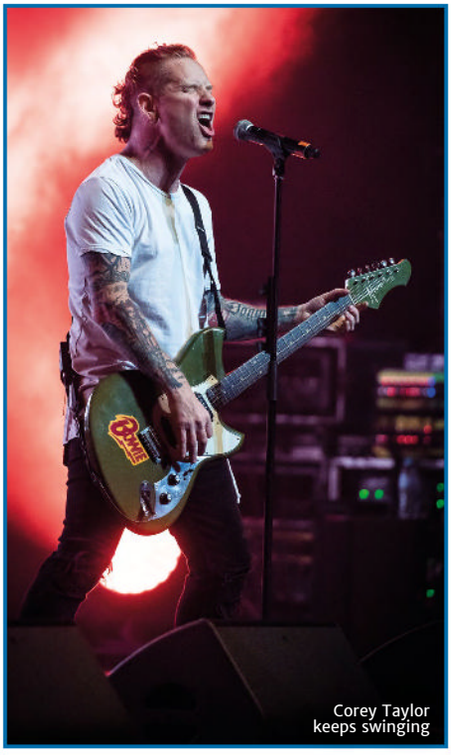
Corey and his band come on to a hero's welcome, and as they peel out the opening lick to The Damned's *Love Song*, it becomes immediately evident that there will be no concessions to environment. Tonight is a full-blooded rock show that interweaves material from Corey's 2020 debut solo album, *CMFT*, with highlights from across his long and illustrious career.

Material-wise, it's hit and miss; you'll have already made up your own mind as to whether *CMFT* is a fun exercise in nostalgia or sub-par hick metal that even Kid Rock would baulk at. Either way, the audience seem divided. Down in the stalls, Corey could serve up an evening of S Club 7 covers and the audience would lap it up ecstatically. Up in the seats, though, there's a far more British reserve when he urges people get moving. You can shout *'JUMPDAFUCKUP!'* as many times as you like, Corey, but the cushioning on these seats is just too damn comfy.

The exception, of course, is whenever the band play any Stone Sour or Slipknot songs (six of the former, two of the latter). And, weirdly, a cover of *SpongeBob SquarePants*… Corey Taylor is nothing if not eclectic. He's also a consummate showman, never letting his energy slip, even when the audience lets theirs. There are no such problems when he airs the likes of Stone Sour's *Bother* or Slipknot's *Wait And Bleed* – the latter preceded by a very amusing story about how the band got a review marked down because they didn't play the song during a headline festival appearance.

Corey Taylor has more than earned the right to do whatever he wants musically, and if he wants to indulge in nights like this, there's clearly a willing audience for it.

REMFRY DEDMAN



Corey Taylor keeps swinging

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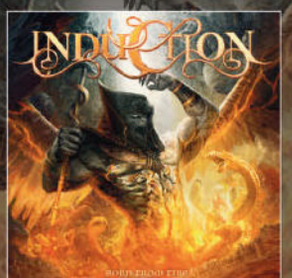

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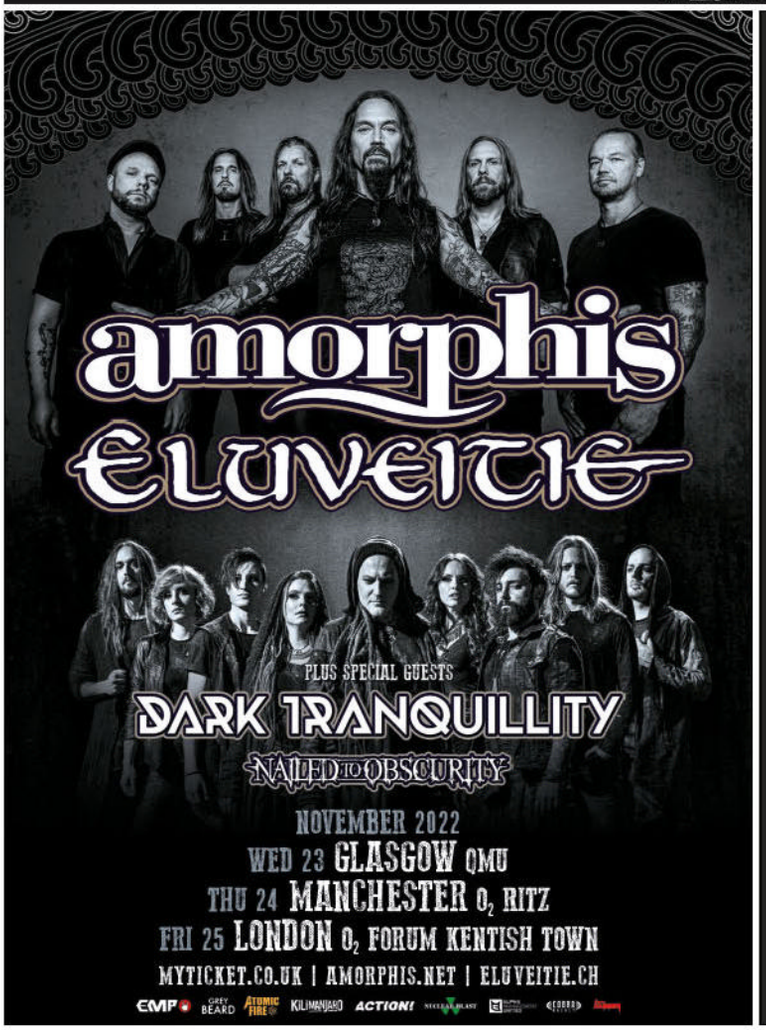
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JOAKIM BRODÉN

SABATON

Sabaton's armour-plated frontman talks new music, Ukraine and the war story that broke his heart

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Your newest song, *Father*, is about Fritz Haber, the scientist who invented both artificial fertiliser and chlorine gas. Hero or villain?
"Depending on which point in his life you look at him, he could be both. If you go by pure numbers, he is responsible for more people being alive than people dying, but he seemed pretty clinical and cold. He said, 'In peacetime, the scientist belongs to humanity; in wartime, to his fatherland,' and that death is death no matter how it's achieved. His wife took her own life and directly after that he left his kid and went to the front. I think that says something about him."

You've done two albums on World War I and now we're getting three EPs about it, too. Are you sick of the Great War yet?
"Yes and no. We could do 50 more albums and never run out of fantastic stories, but we've done the ones we feel the most passionate about for now. We're not going to go into the studio and look at more World War I stuff – I need a break! Ha ha ha!"

Most Sabaton songs are about the Second World War or earlier. Is there a 'too soon' element to writing about more modern or ongoing conflicts?
"With any recent conflict, there's always the danger of us being influenced by what we read in the media. Commanders and politicians don't always tell the truth. A couple of years later historians are looking into it and don't have any skin in the game, and just want to uncover the truth. That's the kind of expertise we want to lean on."

Has what's going on in Ukraine changed your perspective on war?
"Not too much. In Western Europe, it's the first time in a generation that this kind of conflict has been so close to home. But it's quite important to remember that, at any given time, there are dozens of armed conflicts going on all over the world. It might feel new to us, but to a lot of people who live in other parts of the world, war has been their daily life for years."

"WE'RE NOT AS FUCKED AS PEOPLE THINK. THE WORLD IS GETTING BETTER"

Have recent events affected what songs you'll play live?
"No. We're playing *Night Witches* on this tour, which is about Russian bomber pilots in World War II. I don't see how removing that would make any sense whatsoever. We just want to inspire people to learn; ignite a spark that takes them to documentaries or Wikipedia or whatever."

Wikipedia has a bad rap in terms of credibility, doesn't it? Is it more reliable than it gets credit for?
"It depends on the subject. If you look at an ongoing conflict it might be dangerous, because people on both sides are editing on a daily basis. However, if you're going back into historical things, you can look at the sources there. We use Wikipedia quite a lot: it's the fastest way for us to get an overview of a certain topic."

Of all the war stories you've written about, which one has given you the best life lesson?
"One of the biggest gut-punches was *Inmate 4859*: the story of Witold Pilecki. He reported about the atrocities in Auschwitz. He faked his identity and got himself taken there on purpose. Then, when he escaped, no one believed him. He went back [to Poland] and fought in the Warsaw Uprising, and then he got executed as a traitor by the new Soviet government, who thought he could be a leader of a resistance. Sometimes you can do no right. He got written down in his nation's history books as a traitor when he was one of the greatest freedom fighters in modern times."

You've written about wars from thousands of years ago through to the 20th century: they're always happening. Is humanity fucked?
"You're going to have to ask someone way smarter than me. Ha ha ha! My opinion is that we're not as fucked as people think. The world is actually getting better. I'd recommend reading *Factfulness* by Hans Rosling. It will throw a lot of your preconceptions upside down and turn them inside out. It's a proper eye-opener. No spoilers, but it's a super-quick read and super-fun."

THE *WEAPONS OF THE MODERN AGE* EP IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST. SABATON TOUR THE UK IN APRIL

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